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## Private versus public heroes : politics of commemoration

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**Private versus Public Heroes:  
The Politics of Commemoration in Israel, 1949-1963**

Dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Udi Lebel

April 2002



The research was carried out under the supervision of Prof. Efraim Karsh.

## Abstract

This study deals with the period 1949-1963, the years that frame early nation building in Israel and what scholars term the era of Labor Movement political dominance. In the pre-State period, Mapai, the leading party in the Movement, had attempted to attain hegemony as well as dominance over Zionist politics. In doing so, the party had engaged in incessant delegitimation of its political rival — the Revisionist Movement (Etzel and Lehi), what was to become the Herut Movement after independence. From the period of the State's infancy on, Herut would try to counter the negative image produced by Mapai's delegitimation of its policies and activities.

The main arena of collective memory from which Mapai attempted to exclude the contributions of Etzel and Lehi was bereavement and commemoration.

The fundamental research question pertains to the relationship between memory in general and bereavement in particular in the context of political dominance. That is, I focus on the politics of cultural construction not only among a country's living citizens but also among its deceased. Death, it appears, can be recruited to political needs.

The study is divided into five chapters. The first provides the theoretical and contextual framework of the study. It deals with the relationship between political dominance and the construction of collective memory. Four chapters follow, representing the empirical portion of the study. Each focuses on one dimension of what Noret calls *lieux de memoire*, spaces for the realization of political processes and strategies: political, physical-geographic, semantic-symbolic and historiographical.



The conclusion indicates why Mapai's political dominance did not survive for long after the period studied. As cracks in its ability to preserve its hegemony widened, excluded groups were able to penetrate Israel's collective memory. Political dominance, it is shown, weakens when control over collective memory declines.

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## **Preface**

### **Private versus Public Heroes**

Several years ago, upon arriving in Beer Sheva just before starting to teach at the Department of Politics and Government, the University of Beer Sheva, I rented an apartment in one of the last neighborhoods to be constructed in the city, probably during the 1980s. Although it hadn't caught my attention at first, I soon noticed that all the streets in the vicinity of my new home had been named after leaders of "the Revisionist camp," Israel's political right. It came as quite a surprise to me: Streets in the rest of the city all bore the names of leaders associated with the "Labor camp," Israel's political left. Wherever you turned you would be confronted by mention of the forefathers of Israel's Labor Movement, on streets, roundabouts and major intersections, built and named by the State. Suddenly, I found myself wondering whether to turn at Kashani Street or Dresner Street, both named after two among the Oley HaGardom, the Etzel members caught and hanged by the British during the period of the Mandate in Palestine.

My observation was not coincidental, the outcome of local taste. Beer Sheva, like most of Israel's cities, had been controlled for decades by the Labor Movement and its component parties, especially Mapai. The pattern was repeated in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. Only those neighborhoods, like mine, which had been constructed from the early 1980s, the period when the right — "the nationalist camp" — held the reins of government, gradually displayed references to this historic movement.

My curiosity was aroused, and I became aware of another, similar tendency. I noticed that in their history classes, my nephews were studying about heroes and organizations that had fought for Israel's independence, such as the Aharonson family and Nili, the underground organization it helped found, which were absent from the texts that I had used.

These two phenomena — street names and history class subjects — reflect the same, wider trend. As of the early 1980s, the Israeli public has been steadily exposed to more and more information previously concealed from its awareness. In addition to the requisite attention given to defense, the economy and social welfare, the rightist regime that had come to power for the first time had begun to flood Israel's collective memory with what were for the majority new programs, historical events, periods, and heroes. The social engineering performed by its predecessor, the Labor Movement, had made it clear to the Israeli public — but especially to its new citizens, the generations born after 1948 and the waves of immigrants who had not participated in the independence project — that its political parties, ideology, leadership and policy bore exclusive responsibility for the national rebirth of the Jewish people.

Numerous studies delving into the historiography of nations and their wars have already taught us that history is always shaped and written by the victors. In the present case, however, we are not dealing with a dominant Jewish narrative that excluded the alternative Arab narrative. Rather, the case before us is that of a dominant party's narrative that excluded the alternative narrative associated with its assumed partner in a common enterprise. Both belonged to the Zionist camp and both strove to achieve an optimistic vision: the establishment of a Jewish-democratic state in the Middle East.



This study examines the political dynamics of the construction of Israel's collective memory; more explicitly, official commemoration of the nation's martyrs, members of the Jewish fighting forces killed in the pre-State era and immediately afterwards. The study covers the years 1949-1963, a period labeled by scholars of political parties and regimes as *the period of Labor Movement political dominance*. The era depicted displays two prominent characteristics: First, the totality of politics. The entire public sphere as well as most areas of civil life were structured according to decisions made in the political arena. Second, the boundless control exercised by Mapai and its head, David Ben Gurion. As a political movement, Mapai's power was such that no parliamentary coalition could be formed without it as the controlling faction. In reality, the "party" dictated more than health, economic or defense policy — subjects touching upon the affairs of the living — it also determined commemoration policy and historiography, matters concerning the dead. In the period in question, politics had entered the cemetery.

This study could not have been concluded without the friendship, support and assistance of many. It is impossible to list them all. I would like to single out those whose direct help made it possible for me to complete the writing of this dissertation: Maury Kantor of the Labor Party Archives, Amira Stern of the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Doron Aviad of the IDF Archives. In their company and with their assistance, I spent days and nights burrowing through documents, files, and containers, opened for the first time at my request. They tirelessly and graciously, with the utmost professionalism, disclosed the wealth of correspondence, documents, and registries that represent the study's empirical foundations. I would also like to thank the dozens of bereaved families who let me peruse through private letters, documents and personal journals whose contents are made public here for the first

time. Collection of the material could never have been properly completed without the generous assistance of Moshe Prizner of the Ve'Yikra (וַיִּקְרָא) bookshop in Tel Aviv, who helped me locate rare books and commemorative literature published during the period covered. My sincere thanks are also extended to members of the academic community: my supervisors, Prof. Efraim Karsh, Head of the Department of Mediterranean Studies, King's College, University of London, and Dr. Rory Miller, also of the Department of Mediterranean Studies, for their unfailing encouragement; Prof. Gideon Doron for his comments on the research methodology; Dr. Yuval Yonai, Dr. Maoz Azaryahu and Dr. Avishai Erlich for their readiness to work through various issues with me during the course of the research. I likewise wish to thank Mr. Yehiel Kadishai, Cabinet Secretary during the Begin Administration, who dedicated numerous hours to guaranteeing the accuracy of the events described herein. Special thanks are also due to the Jabotinsky Institute and the Yad Tabenkin Research and Documentation Center for their financial support. Finally, I would like to thank Nina Reshef, my translator, whose patience can be seen on every page of the text.

Udi Lebel

April 2002



## **Introduction**

On 14 May 1948 (5 *Iyar*), David Ben Gurion officially declared establishment of the State of Israel. Together with construction of the regime's institutions and administrative agencies, significant efforts and resources were dedicated to the production of a civil culture, its symbols, myths and rituals.<sup>1</sup> This civil culture was required to provide interpretations and meanings, a dominant version of the events that had taken place during the War of Independence and the pre-State goals the War was meant to achieve. For the scholar, this date therefore marks a crucial stage in the development of collective memory and the state rituals that maintain that memory as a vital factor in the game of Israeli national politics.

### **The Period of the Study**

The present study thus deals with the period 1949-1963, the years that frame early nation-building, when Israel's state rituals and collective memory were in process of formation. During its infancy, crucial choices are made with respect to the objects that will embody a nation's symbolic, historical, and ritualistic meanings;<sup>2</sup> especially important, as Mircea Eliade states, is the selection of those symbols that structure perceptions of the collective past. This period is, therefore, the most charged

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<sup>1</sup>Azaryahu, M., 1995, *State Rituals*, Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev and Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

with those meanings that will accompany political structuration and actively influence evolving political processes and culture.<sup>3</sup> The year 1949, the peak of the process of national rebirth, an historical watershed for the Jewish people, the transition from diffusion and exile to deliverance, opens this period.<sup>4</sup> The year 1963, with the resignation from the government of David Ben Gurion, the founding father and master builder of Israel's collective memory, closes it.

Scholars of political parties and regimes label the period 1949-1963 the *era of Labor Movement political dominance*.<sup>5</sup> For the sake of clarity, the Labor Movement was an ideological framework covering several organized factions; Mapai, a political party, functioned as its parliamentary arm first in the pre-State (referred to as the Yishuv) forums and then in Israel's Knesset. With Mapai's increasing strength, political dominance shifted from the Movement to the party; the two would become synonymous in the public mind and in the practice of politics. The preceding period, from 1919 to the initiation of the Jewish community's active struggle for independence in 1947, is identified with the Movement's efforts to attain dominance. In the pre-State period, Mapai attempted to attain dominance over Zionist politics and hegemony over its political system. Statehood marked the seeming conclusion of what came to be called the *1948 Generation's* mission, that of national self-determination. Its efforts to do so are detailed in Yaakov Goldstein's *The Road to Hegemony*, which describes Mapai's behavior during the years 1930-1936,<sup>6</sup> when the aims and strategy that were to characterize the party for generations were crystallized. It could be anticipated that Mapai's leaders would want to reproduce their pre-State

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<sup>3</sup>Eliade, M., trans. W. Trask, 1963, *Myth and Reality*, New York: Harper & Row.

<sup>4</sup>Azaryahu, 1995, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Goldberg, G. 1992, *Israel's Political Parties: From Mass Parties to Electoral Parties*, Tel Aviv: Ramot. (Hebrew)

<sup>6</sup>Goldstein, Y., 1980, *The Road to Hegemony, Mapai — Policy Formation, 1930-1936*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)

organizational framework and political power in the new era. We will thus deal with a period when the political, legal, and procedural rules of the democratic game as it is played in Israel came into existence. Actors and entrepreneurs active in the political arena would utilize these new tools for the preservation of their political might while attempting to acquire the status of a dominant party.

The Herut Movement, the party peopled in the main by Mapai's pre-State political opponents, represented this same opposition after independence. Just as they had in the pre-State period, Herut's members would try to counter their negative image, the product of Mapai's delegitimation of their policies and activities, so as to amass power and effectively threaten the Labor regime.

The political conflict between Mapai and Herut would be played out against the background of the struggle for independence and the organizations that played significant roles in that struggle. Thus, 24 hours after the State was declared, Menachem Begin, the charismatic commander of Etzel (the National Military Organization, a major pre-State underground movement), announced the organization's dismantling as a military force active within Israel's borders (excluding the Jerusalem region, whose status was still uncertain, and overseas operations). Herut, the political body that would work toward fulfillment of Etzel's values and agenda, was subsequently founded; it invested the bulk of its resources in preparation for the 1949 elections. New members were recruited, branches opened, a list of candidates for election was compiled, and a party-affiliated newspaper began publication.

Herut's ideological platform, like its organizational structure, reflected that of Etzel. It stated that the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict involved the use of force, just as Etzel had used force against the British. The Movement likewise stressed that



Etzel was the sole body responsible for laying the foundations of the Jewish nation as an independent state. It justified this contention by claiming that only as a result of its armed struggle were the British driven out of Palestine, an event that freed the area for the confrontation with the Arabs and the eventual establishment of the State.

As to other areas of communal life, Herut was, according to Yonathan Shapiro, essentially a populist party: It advocated direct democracy, a constitution and bill of rights, decision making on national issues by means of referendums and special election of the nation's president. Herut strove to cancel the emergency measures introduced by the British during the Mandate that, in its view, had transformed Israel into a police state. Herut also acted to promote social policies and to improve the living conditions of the lower classes, and supported revocation of Histadrut (the Federation of Labor in Israel) and Kupat Holim (the National Sick Fund) monopolies. Thus, for example, Begin argued in 1949 that if people were hungry — the State should appropriate of bourgeois capital and property.<sup>7</sup> Like Shapiro, Peter Meding interprets these statements as expressions of Herut's socio-economic populism,<sup>8</sup> meant to weaken Mapai's institutional power. This power was rooted in the Yishuv's so-called "national" though non-governmental organizations, the local structures that exerted control over the economy, health services, and what then existed of the public administration.

In the intra-organizational arena, again parallel to the situation in Etzel, Begin led Herut as its sole effective leader and decision-maker. He was the Movement; and the Movement was identified almost solely with his stewardship.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Bader, Y., personal interview cited in Meding, P., 1992, The Herut Delegation Theory — Political and Academic Myth or Reality? *State, Regime and International Relations* 36, 57-85. (Hebrew)

<sup>8</sup>Meding, P. 1992, p. 60.

<sup>9</sup>Shapiro, Y., 1989, *Chosen to Command*, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)

Two parties were therefore created, each identified with a single individual who would wield absolute authority and require unequivocal support from his subordinates: Mapai under David Ben Gurion, and Herut under Menachem Begin.

The period of Mapai and Labor Movement political dominance continued until 1963, all the while under Ben Gurion's sway.<sup>10</sup> During this period, Mapai was able to hold the reins of government and to formulate a public policy that approached absolute control in its penetration of every walk of life. Public space was co-opted, adjusted and manipulated to suit Ben Gurion's political agenda.<sup>11</sup> Two main strategies directed the practices Mapai applied to maintain its political control:

a. Political positioning. In order to garner the majority of electoral votes, the party directed its efforts toward placing itself at the center of the nation's political map. On that map, the dominant party was located at the nucleus of the national movement that had achieved independence.<sup>12</sup> This process was realized in various forms, such as the broadcasting at every opportunity the slogan coined by Ben Gurion — "From a class to a nation" (*mi ma'amad le am*) — referring to the nation-building enterprise. The implicit message identifying Mapai as the deliverer of national and historical fulfillment was addressed to all segments of the population, not only the working class. This trend was repeated in Mapai positions regarding security and foreign policy, which were carefully placed at the ideological center of Israeli public opinion.<sup>13</sup> For example, Mapai was never to include extreme parties within the

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<sup>10</sup>Goldberg, 1992.

<sup>11</sup>Lebel, U., 2002, Cracks in the Mirror of Military Hegemony: The Courts and the Media as Agents of Civil Society in Israel, in D. Korn (ed.), *Public Policy and Administration in Israel*, New York and Baltimore: Lexington.

<sup>12</sup>Almond, G.A., 1960, Introduction: A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics" in G.A. Almond and J.S. Coleman (eds.), *The Politics of Development Areas*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 40-42.

<sup>13</sup>Doron, G., 1986, *To Decide and to Implement*, Rehovot: Kivunim, p. 100. (Hebrew)



coalition governments it formed; it always preferred to align itself with moderate parties. This strategy narrowed the boundaries of the political arena and sustained Mapai's dominance and centrality.<sup>14</sup>

b. Delegitimation of political rivals. With statehood and the institution of a democratic regime, the Revisionist camp, formerly denounced as terrorists (see below) was formally transformed into a legitimate party (i.e., Herut).<sup>15</sup> Yet, attempts to delegitimize the Revisionists continued if not intensified, with the aim of removing Herut from the circle of influence. Mapai's goal was to engrave an image in the public mind of a group unworthy of participating in governance and incapable of threatening its hold on the government. Herut remained excluded from every public and political site under Mapai control, from the Jewish Agency, the junior and senior levels of the public administration, and the military. In contrast, Mapai presented itself as the nation's sole legitimate party, as wholly and uniquely responsible for the State's rebirth, as well nigh equivalent with the State.

The delegitimation program began directly with the 1949 electoral campaign. After the elections, Ben Gurion convened the parties that had obtained seats in the Knesset (Israel's parliament) in order to form a coalition government. These parties, from Mapam to the General Zionists were identified by Ben Gurion as "allied to some degree with constructive forces...."<sup>16</sup> As to Herut, he characterized the Movement as "unworthy of taking part in the government or its branches...."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Meding, 1992.

<sup>15</sup>Despite this change in the institutional environment, there were still "remnants" of the pre-State undemocratic rules of the game. Friedman (Yellin-Mor) and Shmuelevitch, members of Lehi, one of the underground organizations, remained incarcerated in a military prison even after establishment of the State. Their arrest in Haifa, rationalized by the emergency measure ordinances still in effect, was greeted by new Foreign Minister Moses Shartock (Moshe Sharet) (Mapai) : "The snake's head has been chopped," to which he added: "This is wonderful news." See *Herut*, 3 October 1948. (Hebrew)

<sup>16</sup>Ben Gurion, D., 1967, *The Reborn State of Israel*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 371. (Hebrew)

<sup>17</sup>Goldberg, 1992, p. 34.



Yet, a third strategy, explored in this dissertation, was also adopted. It entailed the attempt made by Mapai as well as Herut *to structure voters' perceptions of Israel's collective past*. This strategy's direct audience was the nation's youth and the masses of new immigrants who flooded into the country after independence. Neither group had first-hand experience of the struggle for independence, nor did they hold any firm views about the contributions made by the respective organizations toward the achievement of statehood. Memory, Shapiro argues, is the battlefield of identity: Who contributes more in the endeavor to achieve society's transcendent goals? With whom does historical justice lie? Who is injured and who injures? Who is righteous and who is wicked? In this contest, forgetfulness is as important as recollection: recall only what is convenient, forget the rest. Historiography becomes a major weapon in this campaign, a campaign that is also political at its core.<sup>18</sup> As this study will show, Mapai did its utmost to expunge any trace of Herut's — and its underground antecedents — contribution to statehood from the collective memory of the War by denying them entry into the arenas of official commemoration practices and historiography. This meant that the State refused to recognize the underground's dead and disabled as eligible for its recognition and support. It also meant that the battles in which they had participated and the period of their activity were excluded from the *lieux de memoire* (memory sites, see Chapter 1) recalling the War, produced by Mapai for mass consumption, which dotted the landscape, cultural endeavors and library shelves.

Against Mapai's image as the expeditor of the Zionist dream, these memory sites presented Herut as a non-participant, an irrelevance; they thereby rationalized the latter's exclusion from the locus of political influence. Arguments that Ben Gurion

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<sup>18</sup>Shapira, A., 1997, *New Jews, Old Jews*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 16. (Hebrew)

had used to delegitimize the Revisionists (Herut's forefathers) during the Yishuv were touted as still relevant, despite statehood and the passage of years:

Herut's political army dissolved under the threat of force, although I am not convinced that the tendencies guiding Etzel have been cleansed from Herut's leadership...This party is, therefore, undeserving of entry into a national coalition constructed on the basis of mutual trust or loyalty to the State, and only to the State.<sup>19</sup>

Ben Gurion barred every bid to rehabilitate Etzel and Lehi, the organizations that operated parallel to the Hagana (associated with the Labor Movement) during the struggle for independence. The construction of collective memory, as a strategy, was thus used to recruit the past to the political needs of the present.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, while it selectively excluded the living from positions of power, this process likewise selectively excluded the dead from official state bereavement.

### **The Totality of Politics — To the Death**

I begin with the facts. The Hagana was the most militarily meaningful and effective contingent in the armed effort to realize the seemingly utopian vision of (re)establishing a Jewish state in the heart of the Middle East. Official data, later collected by the IDF's History Branch, reveal that during the War of Independence, "about 1,300 incidents took place, not including the about 100 incidents in which Etzel and Lehi participated, of which about 500 involved the Palmach...There were 6,000 dead, including 1,500 civilians, and about 3,500 members of fighting units, not including Etzel (about 200 dead) and Lehi (about 50 dead), and about 650 in

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<sup>19</sup>Ben Gurion, D., 7 January 1959, *Proposal to the Agenda, The Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>20</sup>Meding, 1972, p. 74.

subsidiary and support units."<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that this division of the war's dead (*martyrs* in the national lexicon) among the separate organizations does not always correspond due to the circumstances in which they fell: Some operations were coordinated by the various organizations within what came to be called "the underground movement" — to be distinguished from the "underground." The title is itself political in character: The three major armed organizations that had fought to oust the British from Palestine were all, technically speaking, undergrounds. However, the Hagana was treated as a "semi-underground" by the British authorities, given the Labor Movement's policy of cooperation with the Mandate in the face of the pending Arab threat. The other two organizations, Etzel and Lehi, were variously called "terrorists" and "thugs" as well as "*the* underground," depending on one's political affiliation and attitude toward their methods. The dissertation retains the more general, popular term applied to Etzel and Lehi: the "underground."

During the period in question, Israeli democracy did not quite meet the criteria set by the liberal model given that the public sphere in addition to numerous areas of private life were structured by political decisions. "The Party" (i.e., Mapai) not only dictated policy in the areas of health, security and the economy, it also determined policy pertaining to bereavement and with it the policy determining commemoration and historiography, areas that influence the nation's perception of its dead. In response to this program, Herut learned to employ the same instruments, based on its comprehension that social legitimation of its entry into the circle of power would be awarded only if its contributions to the War of Independence were made plain. This goal was the mainstay of its activities as an opposition party. Coupled with its

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<sup>21</sup>IDF, History Branch, undated, apparently from 1951, internal document, the IDF Archives \75 - 427 922. (Hebrew)



criticism of government policy regarding the budget, economic and security, Herut's objective was to modify the collective memories about the War produced under Ben Gurion's direction. In the apt words of the nation's foremost critical journal at the time, *HaOlam HaZeh*: "Today, the Party takes care of everything. Mapai gathered the War of Independence under Ben Gurion's wings. Achdut HaAvoda [a party identified with the Labor Movement] incorporated memories of the Palmach, whereas Herut transformed the underground's fighters into an instruments to be used for its own benefit."<sup>22</sup>

### **Conceptual Approach and Methodology**

#### **General**

The study delves into the production and formation of myths as components in collective memory. On the one hand, the dominant party, Mapai, attempted to generate a valid narrative out of some fragments of reality while excluding others; on the other, the opposition party, Herut, tried to integrate those excluded fragments into the national meta-narrative. According to I.M. Lewis, a "myth tells a major truth by means of major lies."<sup>23</sup> The significant efforts invested in the formation of national myths indicate the extent of their political repercussions. Dynasties have always created myths to provide them with the legitimation necessary to maintain their rule. It appears that in the modern age, history has replaced divine inspiration as the main source of legitimacy.<sup>24</sup> Historical facts have undergone careful screening and accumulation, guided by the political-mythic function they were designed to fulfill.

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<sup>22</sup>*HaOlam HaZeh*, 16 April 1958. (Hebrew)

<sup>23</sup>Lewis, I. M., 1974, *Social Anthropology in Perspective*, New York and Middlesex: Harmondsworth, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup>Azaryahu, 1995, p. 5.

The approach directing this study claims that social objects and practices are not produced randomly. Few scholars are privy to the machinations consummated in decisions to embed selected myths within a society's memory sites, whether these be street names, the contents of public school history textbooks or the inscriptions engraved on national monuments. For this reason, it is incumbent upon the researcher to apply rational analytic tools, divorced from the ideological and normative perspectives that guided the myth's producers. In general, an individual's behavior is considered rational to the degree to which that behavior is directed toward achieving the goals set. If that behavior is haphazard and unrelated to those goals, it is considered irrational.<sup>25</sup> The same assumptions can be readily applied in the sphere of politics.

Application of the term *rational* requires clear differentiation between the rationality of means and the rationality of ends. Whereas the first dwells on the effective achievement of goals, the second examines whether the goals themselves are normatively acceptable. Research in political science focuses on the means, leaving goals to philosophy.<sup>26</sup> With respect to goals, I accept the assumption made by Anthony Downs, elaborated in his book *An Economic Theory of Democracy*.<sup>27</sup> According to Downs, the goal of politics is power, its acquisition and application. It follows that political rationality must guide the making of decisions that enable individuals or groups to grasp the maximum power possible. Any decision that does not promote this goal is considered irrational. This assumption enables studying the effectiveness with which goals are achieved and, in this case, the cumulative effectiveness of political power. Steven Brams has argued that political rationality

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<sup>25</sup>Dahl, R. and Lindblom, C., 1953, *Politics, Economics and Welfare*, New York: Harper, p. 38; Doron, G., 1988, *Rational Politics in Israel*, Tel Aviv: Ramot, p. 21 (Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup>This argument relates to the critique of the behaviorist discourse over the question of whether we can at all examine political processes without taking a position with respect to their goals.

<sup>27</sup>Downs, A., 1957, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York: Harper and Row.



also involves estimation of costs and benefits; the resulting estimates influence the actions taken by a significant number of individuals as well as by government.<sup>28</sup> This approach directs research of political rationality to the decision making and policy formation activities associated with the actors' policy objectives. The actors' preference for good alternatives, meaning those that more effectively carry them closer to their destinations, permits the scholar to conclude that their behavior is indeed rational.

The second major aspect of the rationality approach is the scholar's waiver of any normative stance toward the consensual goals reached by the actors investigated. Goals are categorized as rational only after thorough review of the behavioral effectiveness of the actors' attempts to achieve them. Goals may include prestige, status, power, income, influence on public opinion or, in effect, anything that the political actor believes will contribute to maximization of its relative share of power. This insight obliges the scholar to first hypothesize the actor's aspirations. Although inductive analyses begin with empirical descriptions of political behavior, they are unable to arrive at an explanation of why some rather than other choices were made, inasmuch as simple observation of the results of decision making per se cannot reveal the motivations governing political behavior. To identify those motivations, analysis of prior events is required.

The rational approach enables systematic presentation of hypotheses constructed on the basis of a set of explicit assumptions. Given that optimal strategies are not necessarily self-evident, the deductive logic of rational decision making allows differentiation between good and bad, favorable and unfavorable strategies; it

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<sup>28</sup>Brams, S.J., 1993, *The Study of Political Rationality* (Hebrew edition), in B. Zisser (ed.), *The Diversity of Political Science: Analytic Schools and Approaches in the Study of Politics*, Tel Aviv: The Open University, p. 347. (Hebrew)



supports assessment of their appropriateness to the actors' goals — their rationality — as determined by the researcher.

The advantage of this approach thus lies in its ability to provide tools to ascertain the true goals of the actor observed and the materials reviewed. Researchers who have posited their subject's goals a priori have frequently discovered, subsequent to empirical observation of the respective actor's behavior, that the steps taken toward achievement of that goal were not rational. In retrospect, it is clear that the methodological error is rooted in the assumption that the goals identified a priori are necessarily the true goals. An instructive example of the benefits of the rational approach is the study conducted by M. Nash,<sup>29</sup> who showed that the goals of the tropical society studied by him were other than those identified by his predecessors. They had been convinced that the group's major value was accumulation of economic rewards; after they discerned the group's tendency not to maximize its economic potential, this behavior was labeled irrational. Nash, in contrast, decided not to apply western values in this non-western cultural setting. Upon close observation of his subjects, he was able to conclude that equality and the prevention of economic gaps were the society's true core values, a conclusion that led to his reassessment of their economic behavior. The society's choice to under-utilize its economic resources was consequently found to be rational.

The assumption that an actor's behavior is appropriate for the achievement of its goals requires the researcher to empirically observe the decision-maker's behavior and identify its outcomes and meanings, irrespective of the subject's statements regarding those goals. Hence, the rational approach ignores the actor's expressions of intent and concentrates on observed behavior. Due to the mode of its application, this

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<sup>29</sup>Nash, M., 1967, The Social Context of Economic Choice in a Small Society in G. Dalton (ed.), *Tribal and Peasant Economies* (pp. 524-538), New York: Natural History Press.

method has been labeled the revealed preference method<sup>30</sup> because the researcher relies only on data revealed by direct observation.<sup>31</sup>

## History

The memory site at the focus of this study is that of commemoration and the associated historiography. Following Michel Foucault, who stated that politics occupies a site on every level in every arena of social life,<sup>32</sup> the study examines the behavior of Israel's political elite after the establishment of the State in all facets of its policy pertaining to the remembrance and commemoration of War of Independence dead. The study asks whether those memorialized in the State's commemoration project represent all the individuals who participated in the war effort. This question partially rests on the character of historical writing. The historian A.H. Carr states that historians are "selective."<sup>33</sup> As Carr views it, facts speak only when invitation from the historian for it is the historian who decides which facts will be mentioned, in what order, and in what context.<sup>34</sup> Talcott Parsons called for a similar but broader approach. He claimed that science is a system for selectively studying the relationship between society and reality.<sup>35</sup> This approach is applied here regarding the fallen "resurrected" on the State-constructed stage of collective memory and awarded official recognition and commemoration. In order to comprehend and interpret the politics buried in the explored "social cell," I have followed Carr's call to learn about the historian before

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<sup>30</sup>Riker, W. and Ordeshook, P.C., 1973, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup>This method is the opposite of the strategy termed *processual rationality*. In this case, the researcher assumes the studied actors' goals a priori, and then examines whether their behavior is consistent and effective for the promotion of their goals. This method is also entitled the *assumed preferences* method. See Riker and Ordeshook, *ibid.*; Doron, G. 1986, p. 100.

<sup>32</sup>Foucault, M., 1984, Truth and Power, in Rabinow, P. (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon, pp. 51-57.

<sup>33</sup>Carr, A.H., 1986, *What Is History?* Tel Aviv: Modan, p. 25. (Hebrew)

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>Parsons, T. and Shils, E., 1954, *Towards a General Theory of Action*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, p. 167.



approaching the facts.<sup>36</sup> I accordingly attempt to ascertain the political elite's interests in commemoration as a key to understanding the government's actions in the sphere of bereavement and collective memory.

### **The Research Questions**

The study of the production of collective memory has flowered during the past two decades. Particularly significant are George Mosse's highly influential study examining the socio-cultural meanings transmitted by the monuments erected in Europe in the wake of World War I<sup>37</sup> and that of Pierre Noret, who coined the concept *lieu de memorie*.<sup>38</sup> Numerous other studies have likewise shed light on the bias inherent in different aspects of public as well as national attitudes toward commemoration. This body of literature has shown that many areas of experience and group participation commonly perceived as "neutral" because they are presented as "official" or "national" are, in fact, biased. The purpose of this study is to reveal yet another facet of the formation of collective boundaries — and the prevention of specific groups from penetration of those boundaries — by means of political manipulation of bereavement and collective memory.

Within the framework of the present thesis, the institution of bereavement is analyzed as a political site, constructed in the course of political competition and influenced by cultural processes; its outcomes are political. What will be remembered or forgotten, what will be stressed or muted are intimately related to political contingencies and the needs of the participants. Some of these needs are shown to be short-term while others are long-term, framed by the objective of preservation of

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<sup>36</sup>Carr, 1986, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup>Naveh, E. 1994, *World War I and Its Consequences: A Generation of Soldiers Searches for Redemption and Avenues of Articulation*. Tel Aviv: Sifri. (Hebrew)

<sup>38</sup> Noret, P. 1993, Between Memory and History — On the Problem of Place, *Zmanim*, 45, 5-19 (Hebrew edition)

political hegemony and social status. The present study reveals that the associated actions are calculated, rational and conscious. They culminate in the positioning of the excluded groups outside the national narrative. Practically speaking, in the Israeli case, bereaved families belonging to excluded groups were denied equal status and benefits, State support for commemoration of their sons as well as mention of their efforts within educational and historical texts.

The relationships between the dead, their bereaved families and the Israeli elite are revealed to be indicators of bereavement's use in the production of a symbolic and legal infrastructure that endows legitimacy and preferred political status to members of the ruling regime. State recognition of the bereavement experienced by these groups, indicating their inclusion within the national narrative, is shown to be a major mechanism in the construction and reinforcement of socio-political hegemony. Alternatively, the exclusion of the bereavement felt by other groups, those whose contributions to Israel's independence project was denied, pushed to the periphery and excluded from the national narrative, is shown to be motivated by the political interests of the dominant party.

Several studies have dealt with various aspects of Israel's nation-building project. These works focus on identical symbols — the fallen, heroes, and battles — that define the included group within the national narrative. This is the group around which national collective memory was constructed. In complementing this literature, the present study will describe the construction of collective memory by revealing the associated dynamics of peripheralization of groups presenting themselves as rivals to the dominant party. It will also trace the evolution of each group's status: the temporal framework, interests, and cultural-political developments that supported changes in their status. The study reveals, for the first time, the programs, institutions and



organizations that, parallel to their official, elite-controlled counterparts, strove to commemorate and rehabilitate the fallen belonging to the two major underground movements, Etzel and Lehi. It also sheds light on the incessant bargaining conducted with official bodies, as well as the various strategies adopted to force recognition of the underground as partners in the nation-building enterprise.

The majority of studies dealing with collective memory and political culture inadequately elaborate these concepts. Political culture is treated as a given, an independent variable that the scholar is to disclose, whose foundations and values are to be identified and understood. From this perspective, political culture represents a political text to be deciphered through the use of interpretative practices. The text's components are accepted meanings, expressed in a plethora of symbols and subtexts that members of the subject community internalize and distribute in the course of their daily lives.<sup>39</sup>

The literature offers a plethora of research strategies to help the scholar avoid introduction of bias so as to reveal the "true" cultural co-ordinates of the space researched,<sup>40</sup> the majority of which are inspired by phenomenology and symbolic interactionism.<sup>41</sup> These approaches have likewise been applied in numerous studies on Israeli society.<sup>42</sup> The current study adopts a contradictory perspective in an attempt to

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<sup>39</sup>Geertz, C., 1973, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.

<sup>40</sup>See for example W.F. White, 1980, Development of the "Streetcorner Society Fund" Research in M. Shoked, E. Marx and S. Deshen (eds.), *Readings in Social Anthropology* (pp. 257-267), Tel Aviv: Shoken. (Hebrew)

<sup>41</sup>Rogers, C. 1992, The Phenomenological Perspective in Personality Theory in L.A. Hjelle and D.J. Ziegler (eds.), *Personality Theory*, New York: McGraw-Hill; Goffman, E., 1989, *The Representation of Self in Everyday Life*, Tel Aviv: Reshafim. (Hebrew edition).

<sup>42</sup>Evan-Zohar, I, 1980, The Growth and Development of Indigenous Local Jewish Culture in Israel, 1992-1948, *Katedra*, 16, 206-216; Lomsky-Feder, E., 1998, *As if the War Didn't Exist, Stories of the Lives of Israeli Men*, Jerusalem: Magnes, The Hebrew University (Hebrew); Ohana, D. and Wistreich, R., 1997, *The Myth of Memory*, Jerusalem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad (Hebrew); Peri, Y., 1983, *Between Battles and Ballots: The Israeli Military in Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Almog, O., 1993, The Zionists Myths of the Fighting Sabre Belonging to the 1948 Generation, *Maarachot*, 333, 40-47, 50 (Hebrew); Almog, O., 1996, *The Sabre*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved (Hebrew); Galnoor, Y., 1985, *The Origins of Democracy in Israel*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved (Hebrew).

contribute to our understanding of the strategies by which a political party acquires and sustains its own dominant status in society. In my survey of the literature on Israel's political system, especially that employing a comparative methodology,<sup>43</sup> I discovered that the majority of studies rest on the pioneering work of Maurice Duverger.<sup>44</sup> Among the conditions requisite for a party to be defined as dominant, Duverger lists the *spirit of the time*: A party seeking political dominance must express or correspond to the spirit of the time, a period's ambience. Without entering into excessive detail, Duverger's trenchant insight states that the spirit of the time is a real, independent, and fixed cultural product; political actors, treated as dependent and flexible variables, attempt to adapt themselves to a society's basket of values, symbols and meanings. This approach has been adopted by students of political communication who focus on political campaigns. These scholars tend to ask one main question: How can organizations, candidates and parties adapt themselves to the spirit of the time, grasp public opinion, discern nuances in attitudes and ascertain voter needs and demands in order to accommodate, integrate, and provide the appropriate electoral response?<sup>45</sup>

My main argument is that a diametrically opposed process can be observed in the public space. Political actors, already endowed with existing values, symbols and meanings, will attempt to manipulate conditions so as to create a spirit of the time that is suitable to their attainment of dominance. This is a long-term politically-motivated social process in the course of which, among other things, national memory and modes of bereavement are structured with the support of initiatives in the spheres of

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<sup>43</sup>Huntington, S.P., 1968, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

<sup>44</sup>Duverger, M. 1972, *Political Parties*. London: Methuen.

<sup>45</sup>With respect to political campaigns in Israel, see: Shahar, R., 2001, *Leader By Invitation*, Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot (Hebrew); Doron, G., 1996, *Strategy of Electoral Campaigns*, Rehovot: Kivunim (Hebrew); Fox, K and Bar Lev, W., 1999, *Truth and Surveys*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad (Hebrew).



education, culture and social relations. I will reveal how these processes materialized in the context of Israeli politics in the period following the achievement of statehood. I will argue that Mapai — a political party — immediately set upon constructing the spirit of the time in order to secure political salience and party dominance.

If we were to restate this argument in the language of marketing, we might say that the political producer is not interested in adapting its product to the market but in creating a market suitable for its product. This goal requires creation of a cultural monopoly by means of which producers — in this case, a political party — achieve dominance by erecting cultural barriers that prevent competing producers — opposition parties — from penetrating the market and capturing a significant market share.<sup>46</sup>

Such a project was undertaken by Mapai. As a homogenous party whose leadership was predominantly socialist and eastern European in origin, Mapai had to preserve its strength within a society that did not, in the main, share its values, a society of immigrants from countries throughout Europe, Asia and North Africa. To meet this task, Mapai set about forming, among other things, the society's nascent collective memory. Because memory is a major component of a nation's attitudes toward its past as well as its present, Mapai reinforced the historical contours of its status by stressing the contribution of that past to the present. It then translated the associated narrative into the substance of a political culture that imbued the spirit of the time with the party's values and symbols, all done to preserve its salience and status as the nation's natural, uncontested political leader.

The main research question is, then: What is the relationship of memory in general, and bereavement in particular, to political dominance? To paraphrase: The

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<sup>46</sup>An application of this approach in the context of American business can be found in Doron, G., 1979, *The Smoking Paradox*, Cambridge, MA: ABT.

purpose of the study is to focus on the politics of cultural production among a society's dead as well as its living in order to clarify how death can be recruited to political exigencies.

By way of answering this question, the study traces public policy regarding the community of the bereaved, families whose sons had fallen in the battle for independence, but particularly the commemoration policy executed with respect to the dead of three underground movements: Etzel, Lehi and the Hagana. Etzel and Lehi represented the fighting forces of the right wing in Zionist politics, whereas the Hagana represented the left wing. Families associated with the first two were not awarded the symbolic and legal recognition given to families associated with the third; nor were they to enjoy official commemoration of their dead as did Hagana families during the period in question. The study pays special heed to the personality of David Ben Gurion, perhaps the key figure in the formation of Israeli culture with respect to its treatment of the bereaved father but particularly the bereaved mother. His deeds, writings, correspondence with bereaved families, initiatives and decisions relating to all the dilemmas connected with this issue powerfully stamped Israeli attitudes toward commemoration until this very day. State policy, it will be shown, was more a reflection of Ben Gurion's personal opinions than of the positions held by either Mapai or the elites. Ben Gurion's formal leadership and personal charisma were so dominant that years after he retreated from the political stage, every change in policy was influenced by his spirit and demanded his response.

Ben Gurion coined the phrase *mamlachtiyut*, his version of the exercise of sovereignty in the Israeli context. This term became the credo of Mapai and the public administration it constructed and led. As the organizing principle of Israeli policy, the



concept meant *statism*, an ethos or "state religion" embracing all segments of society — immigrants and veteran residents, Ashkenazim and Sephardim and, or so it implied, right and left — as equals under the umbrella of Israeli democracy. Sovereignty represented the melting pot that allowed everyone the opportunity for assimilation and access to jobs within the public administration. The study, guided by the methodology of procedural rationality, reveals that contrary to party declarations, *mamlachtiyut* was nothing but a mechanism of exclusion directed at potential political competitors. Furthermore, from the perspective of substantive rationality, events in the selected arenas reveal that sovereignty, as conceived by Ben Gurion, was not achieved, and that his policy in the area of bereavement and commemoration was inconsistent with its goal of sustained party dominance. That is, in this context, Ben Gurion's behavior was not rational.

It was Frank Parkin who, following Max Weber, showed that political processes are in essence practices for the production of political barriers to be used by those who hold positions of power to hold competing groups at bay (exclusion). In his study, Parkin called for the study of exclusionary strategies in addition to the strategies employed by the excluded groups in direct response to their obstructed status.<sup>47</sup> The current study treads the path laid out by Parkin. It appears that in Israel, the two strategies operated in parallel, just as Parkin had observed in his own research. The "counter-culture" of symbolic and political mechanisms produced was similar to, yet independent of the "official" versions, and accompanied by relentless attempts to penetrate the elite, to become cultural, political and social "insiders."

This process found expression in the sphere of Israeli bereavement and collective memory at the very moment when rituals of remembrance and

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<sup>47</sup>Parkin, F., 1979, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York: Columbia University Press.

commemoration were constructed. These rituals had a dual function: Not only did they echo the central themes of the evolving political culture, they also determined that culture's disposition. The resultant institutions were long-lived, not the least due to their having developed in tandem with national consolidation. "Routine" politics, marked by uninterrupted power struggles, operated in a defined area, attuned to a static view of the past that either supported or eroded the legitimacy of the actors competing over positions of power. After consideration of the events, we can readily agree with Pierre Vidal-Naquet that the annihilation of memory<sup>48</sup> is simply a rational strategy for the exclusion of those political competitors that pose effective threats to the elite's power, access to which, as stated, is the instinctive goal of every political entrepreneur.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Vidal-Naquet, P., trans. A. Eldor. 1991, *Memory's Murderers*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew edition).

<sup>49</sup>Easton, D., 1953, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, New York: Knopf.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One presents the theoretical and conceptual framework applied throughout the study. The relationship between political dominance, collective memory and bereavement are analyzed from various perspectives. Evidence supporting the analysis and its conclusions was culled from numerous sources, including the political science and political sociology literature.

The following four chapters represent the empirical portion of the study. Each chapter focuses on one of the dimensions comprising the *lieux de memoire*, to borrow Noret's phrase, the space where these political processes and strategies were enacted.

Chapter Two focuses on the political dimension. It examines legislation as a vehicle for the overt expression of power. Legislation leaves little room for doubt or interpretation about its meanings or implicit impacts. The chapter reveals the attempts to exclude Etzel and Lehi dead from every arena implying formal, legal recognition of their relations as members of the official "family of the bereaved." This was accomplished through obstructing their eligibility for a wealth of services elaborated in laws meant to institutionalize support and succor this exclusive community. The significance of these laws, other than their financial impacts, lies in their use for State recognition of the contributions made by the fallen.

Chapter Three stresses the physical-geographic dimension. Immediately after the establishment of the State, Israel's landscape was transformed into the main arena for the practice of commemoration. Monuments, statues and military cemeteries soon became State instruments for placing commemoration of the dead high on the public agenda. In this area as well, strict exclusion of Etzel and Lehi supporters was practiced by the elite.



Chapter Four turns to the semantic-symbolic dimension of sovereignty. Civil rituals, particularly memorial day observances, were used to transmit images of heroes and other symbols, formulated according to elite interests along social communication networks. These, too, reveal political processes.

Chapter Five turns to historiography. This is perhaps the central and most meaningful chapter, not the least because Ben Gurion, more than any of Israel's leaders, placed such great weight on the writing of history. In addition to the personal diaries he diligently kept, Ben Gurion initiated and participated in hundreds of historiography projects for the purpose of documenting and commemorating the forces active in the nation's rebirth. As will be shown, this sphere as well reveals the rationality of a leadership that understood the long-term political significance of official versions of history, to be taught for decades to the nation's younger generation and its immigrants.

My conclusion can be viewed as an epilogue of sorts. Mapai's political dominance did not survive long after the period under discussion. Cracks in its ability to preserve its status soon appeared; as they widened, leaders of the excluded groups were able to penetrate, slowly, Israel's collective memory. The epilogue reviews several of these groups' successful attempts to penetrate the statist arena and reinforces the study's capacity to explain the relationship between the construction of collective memory and political dominance. Political dominance, it is shown, weakens when control over collective memory declines.

#### **Sources and Methodology**

The research strategy adopted in the study is historical-political. The material on which the study is based includes documents collected in public and private archives, the majority of which have yet to be publicized.<sup>50</sup> In addition, many in-depth interviews were conducted with members of bereaved families,<sup>51</sup> decision-makers and representatives of the political movements active during the period studied. Moreover, newspapers items were carefully reviewed, especially those appearing in the contemporary daily press. Two newspapers were of crucial importance: *Davar* and *Herut*.<sup>52</sup> Whereas the first was a vehicle for the transmission of Mapai's official position, the second was aligned with Herut. Extensive use was also made of the commemoration literature produced after the War of Independence. These can be found in public libraries, the homes of bereaved families and in public commemoration sites.

The archives opened to me in the course of the study are:

1. Beit Hasofer Archives, Tel Aviv
2. Beit Ya'ir Archives, Tel Aviv
3. Ben Gurion Archives, Sde Boker
4. Government Archives, The National Archives,  
Jerusalem
5. Hagana Archives, Tel Aviv
6. IDF and Ministry of Defense Archives, Givatayim
7. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Tel Aviv

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<sup>50</sup>For the scholars interested in exposing unknown facets about the interests and actions of Israel's governments during the period of the research, private archives are of exceptional importance. To be found there is the correspondence carried on between families and the government elite, documents that shed new light on the accepted image of public policy within the area researched.

<sup>51</sup>Requests for a personal interview were sent to all the families of Etzel and Lehi fallen as well as to dozens of families of Hagana fallen. As a result of the readiness of several to cooperate and disclose documents as well as be interviewed, several meetings were held with the researcher, the majority at the homes of the interviewees.

<sup>52</sup>To differentiate between Herut the political movement/party and *Herut* the newspaper, the latter always appears in italics in the body of the research.

8. Labor Party (Mapai) Archives, Beit Berel
9. Theatre Archives, Tel Aviv
10. Yad Tabenkin Archives, Ramat Efal

Several studies that examined a number of aspects of Israel's nation-building project should be mentioned here; each touches upon the current study. Hannah Naveh's *Imprisoned by Bereavement* describes how bereavement is reflected in Israeli literary works;<sup>53</sup> Hannan Hever's *A Sudden View of War* reviews Hebrew poetry;<sup>54</sup> Mordechai Bar On's *Written in a Book* surveys the crystallization of Israeli historiography on the War of Independence during the nation's first decade;<sup>55</sup> and *Histories*, by Eyal Naveh and Esther Yogev, discusses the public controversies surrounding the teaching of history in Israel's schools.<sup>56</sup> Three pioneering studies deserve special mention: *State Rituals*, Maoz Azaryahu's study of Remembrance Day and Independence Day celebrations during 1948-1956;<sup>57</sup> *Commemoration and Memory*, Ilana Shamir's examination of memorials and commemoration projects;<sup>58</sup> and *The 1948 Generation*, Emmanuel Sivan's analysis of the social profile of War of Independence fallen.<sup>59</sup> All these works, however, deal with institutional bereavement (what I would call *dominant bereavement*) as it is expressed by the included groups, and with the hegemonic ethos Ben Gurion constructed in the wake of the War of Independence. In contrast, the study presented here deals with how the government elites related to other groups, those excluded from collective memory and social

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<sup>53</sup>Naveh, H., 1993, *Imprisoned by Bereavement*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew)

<sup>54</sup>Hever, H., 2002, *A Sudden View of War*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew)

<sup>55</sup>Bar On, M., 2001, *Written in a Book, The Beginnings of Israeli Historiography of the 1948 War*, Tel Aviv: Maarachot, Ministry of Defense. (Hebrew)

<sup>56</sup>Naveh, E. and Yogev, E., 2002, *Histories*, Tel Aviv: Bavel. (Hebrew)

<sup>57</sup>Azaryahu, M., 1995.

<sup>58</sup>Shamir, I., 1996, *Commemoration and Memory*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)

<sup>59</sup>Sivan, E., 1990, *The 1948 Generation*, Tel Aviv: Maarachot. (Hebrew)



communication networks. The studies mentioned guided me in my rereading of the source materials upon which this study rests and in my attempt to present the events from a different perspective for the purpose of adding to our understanding of the issues in question.

It should be noted that unless stated otherwise, all Hebrew texts and original documents have been translated by me. Furthermore, many individuals kindly entrusted me with letters and other documents, as noted in the footnotes.

## Chapter One

### Theoretical Framework

The strategic interest of every party installed in the seat of power is to guarantee the survival of its regime and its continued reelection. These are the major political goals that determine the current behavior and future decisions of every party in power. We can likewise expect that all party activities and policies will be directed toward these aims. Adopting the terminology of theories of regimes and political party, we can claim that the aim of every party, once it has succeeded in gaining power, is to become the nation's dominant party.

In the political science scholarship devoted to the study of political parties, attention has naturally turned to those parameters that appear to explain coalition formation within the context of democratic parliaments. Hence, definitions of the concept *dominant party* prevail in the terminology of coalition or party theory. Samuel Huntington has argued that a dominant party is one that cannot be replaced, a fact that guarantees its control.<sup>1</sup> Asher Arian, subscribing to this view, states that such a situation is characterized by the absence of conditions conducive to creating an opposition or providing alternatives to the party in power.<sup>2</sup> A somewhat less vague criterion is provided by Gabriel Almond, who contends that dominant parties are

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<sup>1</sup>Huntington, S.P., 1968, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

<sup>2</sup>Arian, A., 1973, *The Voting Public*, Ramat-Gan: Masada, p. 50. (Hebrew)

found at the helm of national liberation movements.<sup>3</sup> Almond provides indicators that elucidate the place occupied by dominant parties in the ideological-political arena — the center — as well as the historical moment that permitted access to this position: the drama of the struggle for the state's emergence and consolidation.

Blondel, Sartori and Burger each contribute more precise definitions, including quantitative variables, of dominant parties. According to Blondel, who bases his conclusions on comparative studies of political systems operating in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Italy and France as of 1958, the dominant party is the party that wins at least 45% of the vote.<sup>4</sup> Sartori, who prefers the phrase "para-dominant party," adds that such a party must win three consecutive elections.<sup>5</sup> Para-dominant parties that meet these criteria can be found in Uruguay, Japan, Turkey, India, Norway, and Sweden. In contrast, Burger, who based her research on India, argues that a para-dominant party must obtain at least 56% of the seats in parliament.<sup>6</sup>

Giora Goldberg,<sup>7</sup> in his pioneering study of Israel's political system, also proposed quantitative variables for determining a ruling party's dominance (the specific question he explored was whether Mapai, the party in power throughout most of Israel's history, indeed conformed to these definitions). The three conditions (what he calls "contexts") or indicators of party dominance are:

- One. *The inter-party context:* The party that obtains at least 10% more than the votes won by its opponents in three consecutive elections.

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<sup>3</sup>G.A. Almond, 1960, Introduction: A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics, in G.A. Almond and J.S. Coleman (eds.), *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, pp. 40-42.

<sup>4</sup>Blondel, J., 1969, *Comparing Political Systems*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup>Sartori, G., 1976, *Parties and Party System*, Vol. 1., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup>Burger, A.S., 1969, *Opposition in a Dominant-Party System*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Goldberg, G., 1992, *Israel's Political Parties: From Mass Parties to Electoral Parties*, Tel Aviv: Ramot. (Hebrew)



Two. *The oppositional context:* No party can replace the party in power as no one party holds at least two-thirds of the total number of mandates held by all opposition parties taken together.

Three. *The social context:* The ruling party maintains ideological supremacy over an opposition that recognizes its power; in addition, the majority of the public identifies with the ruling party, which is perceived as expressing the spirit of the period in which critical events took place, such as the achievement of national independence.

The majority of studies on this subject rest on the work of Maurice Duverger, one of the first scholars to investigate the phenomenon of party dominance. As we have seen, Goldberg, following Duverger, did not confine himself to estimates of parliamentary majorities as the necessary or even sufficient condition for consolidation of party dominance.

Like other scholars, Duverger maintains that party dominance is not confined to the parliamentary arena. In his view, a dominant party is considered as such even if it does not always obtain a clear electoral majority. To Duverger, the fundamental condition for attributing dominance is the party's sway over cultural rather than political phenomena, what he calls *gestandt* (*spirit of the time*), the ambience or, alternatively, the *sociological factor*. This variable represents the spiritual superiority held by the party and by those identified with it, a condition that allows the party to maintain its grasp over extended periods of time. Stated differently, the sociological factor provides cultural and psychological advantages in response to the way in which the general public perceives the party. Duverger argues that: "The party is dominant

when it is identified with an epoch, when we can say that its doctrines, ideas, and methods, its style so to speak, coincide with those of the epoch." Thus, Duverger differentiates between party influence and party power (strength in his terms), two major concepts that, due to their similarity, continue to divide political scientists. Alternatively, because party dominance is "linked with belief,"<sup>8</sup> it is a consensual phenomenon: The entire public — not just party leaders — accepts its preeminence. In essence, we are dealing with a case where perception and image meet: "A dominant party is that which public opinion believes to be dominant. Even the enemies of the dominant party, citizens who refuse to give it their votes, acknowledge its superior status and its influence; they deplore it but admit to it."<sup>10</sup>

Duverger's search for analytic instruments embodies an approach not often found in traditional models of coalitions, alliances, or political structuration, although it would appear to be of interest to parties intent on such a status. Duverger's perspective offers party leaders with a challenge that goes beyond parliamentary and coalition victories: establishment of the party's image as the embodiment of the spirit of the time, that is, creation of the sociological factor that facilitates maximization of the party's political power. This goal resembles the concept of *hegemony*. More than political superiority, hegemony reflects the collective consciousness and cultural attitudes held by the socio-political elite together with those who are subject to their power irrespective of whether they support them or not. Hegemonic leaders are perceived as controlling the system's operational mechanisms — they are responsible for managing the public administration and its decision-making processes — but also

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<sup>8</sup>Duverger, M., 1972, *Political Parties*, London: Methuen, pp. 308-309.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



as embodying the society's moral leadership, as symbols that represent society and identify its values.<sup>11</sup>

Viewed from the position of critical theory, the conventional image of ruling elites interested in establishing and reproducing their preferential political status implies the desire to attain and preserve political hegemony. It was Gramsci who coined the term in an attempt to describe the social control exerted through beliefs and ideas that become so common and uncontested that they appear to describe the "natural" order of things.<sup>12</sup> That is, hegemony refers to the conceptual foundations upon which the political leadership constructs its claims to an elevated social status. Belief in the political elite's worthiness and inherent qualifications for this position guarantees its continued hold. Significantly, the situation described is neither that of arbitrary coalition majorities or of random parliamentary victories; on the contrary, the group found at the apex of the political system is considered to be one of its enduring elements. To sustain this image, dissension is avoided for dissension creates doubt, an attitude that undermines the taken-for-granted character of this situation. The "game" played by these societal actors represents, as Gitlin states, a cognitive process that entraps not only the ruled, but also the rulers, for both groups perceive the political elite as committed to the interests of both, as the society's genuine rulers. Hegemony represents, in effect, the reverse of what the functionalists, proponents of pluralism, call *consensus*, the normative agreement they view as necessary for society's survival. In contrast, for critical scholars, consensus, now dubbed hegemony, is the product of a system of control that serves narrow interests.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, according to Duverger and to Goldberg in his wake, dominance, like hegemony, relates to the formal dimensions of control but also to its informal, implicit

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<sup>11</sup>Bockok, R., 1986, *Hegemony*, London: Tavistock, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup>Gramsci, A., 1971, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

<sup>13</sup>Thompson, K. 1986, *Beliefs and Ideology*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood.



dimensions. Whereas study of overt forms of control reveals how the allocation of economic resources reflects acting coalitions, parliamentary behavior, and ruling group preferences, study of the latent dimensions of control unveils the subliminal aspects of cultural control and how the allocation of social values ensures the prolonged preferential status of selected groups. In constructing this picture of hegemony, critical theory reflects the view, prevalent among social scientists, that culture is the locus for the social production of meaning; that is, cultural processes produce and distribute social meanings.<sup>14</sup>

This approach has likewise been applied by scholars of political communication following the wave of dissent and subversive initiatives directed toward the incorporating reform within the public discourse. The prevailing view is that political initiatives are, by themselves, insufficient to stimulate public acceptance of new ideas. What is required is creation of an appropriate atmosphere, cultural conditions amenable to the acceptance of these ideas.<sup>15</sup> This ambience, operating as an *independent variable*, represents an *interpretive package* in the words of Gamson and Modigliani, a cultural derivative whose meanings and associations are ascribed to events and institutions by a society's members. Hence, competition among political actors is, to all effects, competition among different interpretive packages constructed from meanings produced within the public discourse.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, political actors can themselves construct these interpretive packages, some of which gain dominance and provide the normative principles (or worldview) from which political behavior and stratification are derived. From the vantage of politics, culture breeds the political

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<sup>14</sup>Geertz, C. , trans: Yoash Meisler, 1992. *The Meaning of Culture*, Jerusalem: Keter. (Hebrew)

<sup>15</sup>See for example Doron, G. and Lebel, U., 2000, An Institution On Trial: The Defense System Against Bereaved Parents, *Plilim*, 9, 285-369.

<sup>16</sup>Gamson, A. and Modigliani, A., 1989, Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach, *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.

institutions that structure reality and prescribe behaviors and knowledge that are later perceived independently of their political origins and are thus taken for granted.

This cyclical process explains the impression that the actions of hegemonic elites, the groups that control the production of meaning and allocation of cultural values, represent "self-fulfilling prophecies." It supports the rise to power of those elites most proficient in producing and then transmitting the social messages that reinforce their own political dominance. In general, to be effective, interpretive packages must endow actors, parties, and messages with acceptability, meaning and normative superiority; if successful, they can construct the links that bind institutions to social self-maintenance processes. As theories of decision making and social psychology teach us, any object or action perceived as furnishing advantages that ensure survivability — in sociological terms, group preservation — acquires preferential status in the hierarchy of social values. Objects and actions that ensure survival come to be perceived as more meaningful vis-à-vis institutions that are associated with "secondary" values such as self-actualization or social well-being. In other words, objects, behaviors, personalities, and even provocative or engaging ideas can be incorporated into self-maintaining interpretive packages that link those phenomena to social survival. Hence, if the political demands motivated by these interests are impressed in the public mind, internalization of these demands as critical values will be hastened. Something similar occurs with respect to political parties: Parties that focus on security and are perceived as actively working to fulfill this function — that is, produce the requisite cultural packages — will attract greater attention and support than will parties that deal with the other, more "mundane"



subjects found at the periphery of what Maslow conceives as the pyramid of human needs.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, from the point of view of political parties attempting to achieve dominance and socio-cultural hegemony, the question remains open as to the method of incorporating the sociological factor into their identity. How will they adapt themselves to the spirit of the time, to the major ideas or themes preoccupying the voters? How, given their superior status, ideology, and institutions will they succeed in distributing effective interpretive packages that will tie the public to major national goals and communal survival? According to Duverger and his disciples, the interpretive packages producing the party's image come to represent this spirit, now functioning as an independent variable, objective, historical, and inevitable. Hence, each party gears itself to the challenge of adaptation. Moreover, this challenge is accepted by every political actor seeking hegemonic social control.

Despite the appeal of this argument, an alternative view is presented here: The spirit of the time is conceived as a *dependent variable*. Consequently, the ruling party's challenge is to create this spirit within a program of political action that includes the distribution of the supporting interpretive packages. Within this conceptual framework, the spirit of the time, as an entity, is a subjective, sociological factor produced by calculated, rational, political manipulation. Those of its constituent values or symbols that pertain to communal survival and security, as ingredients in an interpretive package, are none other than the products of political practices initiated by the dominant party to preserve its status. Thus, the allocation of values, in conjunction with the distribution of economic resources and exercises in coalition formation, enables the ruling group to manufacture the ambience that reinforces its

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<sup>17</sup>See Shapira, B., 1988, *There is Order to the Public Agenda*, MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, Department of Political Science. (Hebrew)



integration within the socio-political structure and society's sanction of its rule. To summarize, I argue that this atmosphere, ideological climate, or spirit of the time is the product of rational political engineering. Such a project doubtless entails long-term investments, especially when compared with the short-term investment of assets and energy required for the bargaining associated with coalition formation, budgeting, and other undertakings that characterize day-to-day public policymaking. This extended time frame is warranted by the outcome of those investments — sustained dominance — the fundamental goal of any political or social movement. As will be demonstrated, this orientation toward the future adopted by the political actors in question enabled them to manipulate values and normative assets to the benefit of an interpretive package supporting their regime.

The most appropriate location for construction of the spirit of the time is collective memory. Again, we must ask what interests might motivate political movements operating in the present to emphasize the past? It appears that the past, by means of the manner in which it is perceived, taught, understood and distributed, is the key site for the production of worldviews and expectations directed at the present and future. It follows, I argue, that a society's view of its past directly shapes the contemporary spirit of the time and perception of political actors as legitimate.

Talmud and Yonai apply the term *hegemonic regions* to those cultural arenas, issues, and institutions that provide major hegemony-supporting assets. They argue that the entire society, the rulers and the ruled, sequester these arenas and position them beyond the reach of public debate, where competitive forces can come into play. These sites are therefore bounded by a consensus that crosses all sectoral boundaries

due to their status as intrinsic and thus unquestioned beliefs (the social ethos).<sup>18</sup> From the moment that it captures the reins of government, the political elite transforms collective memory into a hegemonic region. This act of appropriation awards the elite clear-cut political advantages over its rivals. From its position of power, the dominant party attempts to reconstruct the contents of crucial social networks —especially knowledge-transmitting institutions (particularly educational and research institutions) — into socialization agents supporting the ruling party's needs. We should note that the sooner formulation of a community's or society's collective memory begins, the greater the benefits to the group that spreads the requisite interpretive packages by means of that memory. More time is thereby freed for internalization of the interpreted collective past and its incorporation as part of the group's taken-for-granted cultural identity.

Some scholars contend that collective memory is the most significant of the social assets available for construction of political communities. Emanuel Sivan, for example, argues that as part of its evolution, every community, but more so the nation-state, must first become a *memory community*.<sup>19</sup> Memory is a fundamental condition; it binds individuals to the meanings and legitimacy underlying their internal sense of affiliation and external demands for recognition as members of a community. This process also has a "negative" side: Ernest Renan, among the first to deal with the issue of nationalism, notes that nationalism is not just what is remembered, it is also what is forgotten. As evidence for his claim, he cites the

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<sup>18</sup> Talmud, M., 1986, *Between Politics and Economics: Public Agreement Versus Ideological Distinctions in Israel*, MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, The Department of Sociology and Anthropology (Hebrew); Yonai, Y., 1986, *Is There Really No Choice?*, MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, The Department of Sociology and Anthropology (Hebrew).

<sup>19</sup> Sivan, E., 1991, *The 1948 Generation: Myth, Image and Memory*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 191.



omission from official texts of the Catholics' massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Eve as an attempt to establish national unity in France.<sup>20</sup>

Memory is thus a mechanism for defining the individual's self-image as well as a tool for delineating the group's/state's boundaries, that is, for developing national consciousness. An elite wanting to achieve hegemony in an evolving society will attempt to impose uniformity on the mosaic of different memories found in its environs, and will initiate what Yoram Bronowski terms *narratives of recollection or the history of forgetfulness*.<sup>21</sup> In this context, the actors who frame memory fulfill a dual function: They reflect the society's evolving socio-political ethos at the same time that they determine the coordinates at which this political culture is fleshed out. In this way, a *perpetuum mobile* is initiated in which changing collective memory (expressed, for instance, in state commemoration practices) reflect the dialectic tensions at the heart of every society at the moment when recollection is constructed.<sup>22</sup>

The importance of collective memory as a unifying force is corroborated by the resources that infant nation-states devote to the formation of an exclusive set of symbols, myths and rites within national civic culture. These elements provide the interpretations and meanings that place the infant state on a new cultural-historical continuum. They spin the narrative describing the advent of national sovereignty and, most significantly, they determine the accepted components of political identity. In doing so, these cultural products award preferential status to those considered responsible for the national enterprise. In other words, by determining which individuals and groups will be recalled as the nation's founding fathers, collective

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<sup>20</sup>Renan, E., 1882. *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Paris: Calman-Levy, pp. 9-26.

<sup>21</sup>Bronowski, Y., 1 October 1993, Narratives of Recollection, or the History of Forgetfulness, *Haaretz*, p. 5B. (Hebrew)

<sup>22</sup>Liebman, S. and Don Yehiya, E., 1983. *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, p. 9.



memory awards those selected with the right to claim preferential political status in the future.

Mircea Eliade notes that the period of national genesis is pivotal when viewed from the perspective of collective memory and its relationship to all the factors connected to the establishment of the modern state. As the period most charged, meaningfully and symbolically, for members of the community, it will accompany consolidation of the nation's political structures but only to the degree that two other elements are present: a broadly held ideologically or appropriate cultural ambience, and motivated actors who can actively influence the process of national consolidation.<sup>23</sup>

Contrary to Eliade, some scholars consider collective memory to be a methodological artifact, having no political salience when considered on the objective level. To counter this argument, obstacles to the observation of collective memory must be removed. This involves overcoming temporal limitations, locating public as well as private records, and gradually unearthing data with archaeological and archival methods. Viewed from this perspective, collective memory challenges the scholar to reveal the past, locate bits of information, and wipe society's spectacles clean on route to ascertaining what really happened. The events selectively experienced by numerous individuals and sub-groups are "relived" through the research, now under the heading of their shared history, political identity and fate. This assumes that for the subjects, memories are the main factor guiding construction of their collective identity and social consensus. For them, the past is an objective entity, real and immutable, begging to be raised from the depths and distributed far and wide.

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<sup>23</sup>Eliade, M., 1963, *Myth and Reality*, New York: Harper and Row.

Adherents of this approach describe the evolution of collective memory as a spontaneous and pluralistic process, the creation of a chain of memories retained by individuals and groups, with each independently adapting the contents of personal memory to a common framework. These memories are then synthesized into a new entity, one that converts individual members of society into a community having shared memories.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, Maurice Halbwachs, Durkheim's disciple, does not consider memory to be an evolving objective, historical fact. He views collective memory as a socio-political construct. In his paper on the phenomenon of social recollection, Halbwachs notes that memory, by necessity, is linked to a network of meanings and orientations that are impersonal and yet anything but arbitrary: These meanings and orientations are focused and channeled within the socio-political discourse.<sup>25</sup>

We can assume, then, that any leadership desirous of achieving and retaining political dominance as well as hegemonic control over a society's collective memory cannot be content with unmanageable historical or scholarly inputs, with unadulterated bits of information accumulated from the wellspring that represents the community's heritage. Such a leadership is well aware of the need for new versions of the recollected past, renditions supportive, first and foremost, of its capacity to unify the greatest possible number of community members about itself. In his study on the traditions associated with national movements, Eric Hobsbawm argued for the existence of just such a process. As he conceives it, elites "contrive" the required memories; they make political use of history to substantiate their legitimacy and the actions initiated by them to unite the community about their desired agenda. Hence,

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<sup>24</sup>Halbwachs, M. 1980, *Collective Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press ; Hartman, G., 1994, *The Visible Darkness*, 2000, 10, 68-93 (Hebrew).

<sup>25</sup>Halbwachs, 1980, pp. 167-169.



the history that supports a nation's, state's, or movement's store of knowledge and ideology does not encompass the breadth of factual memory but only what was chosen, portrayed, distributed and institutionalized by those assigned the task of doing so.<sup>26</sup>

Collective memory, it follows, is not a spontaneous, grassroots phenomenon even if the individuals who produce it continue to believe in its pristine character. We are, in effect, speaking of a political construct, resting on manipulative foundations: It represents an instance of appropriation of the past for the sake of the present and future interests of the state and the elite. Pierre Noret suggests the concept *lieu de memorie* (memory site) to capture this phenomenon, directed from the top. These sites, established by the ruling elite that controls decision making in the political and national arenas, are used to penetrate the societal discourse that is stamped with contents (i.e., memories) favorable to it.<sup>28</sup> Noret is convinced that as a result of this process, collective memory loses its ability to spontaneously "remember" the past.<sup>29</sup>

Noret further argues that a *lieu de memorie* houses meaningful qualities associated with a real or imagined entity, transformed into a symbol for a given community as a result of deliberate acts or subsequent to the passage of time. Memory sites, *lieux de memorie*, link the physical — geographically placed objects such as monuments, flags, or street names that commemorate leaders and heroes — with the temporal. A succinct example is Bastille Day, annually celebrated by the French public on 14 July. In Noret's view, any expressive vehicle for the penetration, dissemination and anchoring of memory within the public discourse is a memory site.

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<sup>26</sup>Hobsbawm, E., 1983 Invention of tradition: Introduction, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 12-13.

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<sup>28</sup>Noret, P., 1993, Between Memory and History — The Problem of Place, *Zmanim*, 45, 5-19. (Hebrew)

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.



He labels the community's aggregate of memory sites its *symbolic repertoire*. Collective memory thus constitutes all the signs and mechanisms that a group preserves temporally and spatially in order to remind its audience of past events. These events, however, are not random: Because they have been recruited to political ends, they "monopolize" memory. Noret himself describes *lieux de memoire* as empty shells deposited on the shore after the sea of memory has ebbed.<sup>30</sup>

Collective memory is constructed in three main stages: First comes the *screening* — the careful selection of what is worth remembering — of facts and events drawn from the past that conform to the desired image of the elite currently consolidating its position. In the process, the ruling group appoints agents to classify and select the preferred version from among the historical facts available. Selection of what is remembered and what is forgotten, what is stressed and what is ignored, who are the heroes and who the villains, is conducted in accordance with ideological and moralistic directives. The second stage, *interpretation* — mediation of all past events or the placing of those events within the narrative — occurs prior to their presentation to the public. These interpretive packages are chosen from among competing meaning-assigning interpretive options. Stage three is *distribution* — the establishment of official memory sites to be marketed for the purpose of the public's internalization of their information and political meanings. To summarize, in Noret's view, internalized collective memory is nothing other than the product of calculated political action, employed to facilitate imposition of hegemony over the public discourse. James Young writes in the introduction to his book *The Texture of Memory* that memory is not created in a vacuum, hence, its motives are never pure.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>31</sup>Young, J.E., 1993, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven and London: Princeton University Press, p. 2.

The key to understanding the concept collective memory is, therefore, its detachment from the personal memories of its individual bearers. Memory sites can be born and nurtured because memory is not spontaneous; archives must be established, anniversaries celebrated, rituals organized, eulogies delivered for memories require "tangible points of reference" by means of which society's members can relate to the event recalled. As Bar On argues, we are speaking of a social process, the result of social dynamics and interpersonal communication. This phenomenon is not dependent upon individuals despite the inward nature of the experience; it rests on the fact that individuals are members of the society that nurtured them.<sup>32</sup> Hence, study of a society's collective memory necessitates a shift to the dominant political discourse. The relationship between the collective memories of the groups participating in as well as excluded from that discourse is what interests the researcher. Comparisons will undoubtedly reveal significant variance in the perception and comprehension of events among different groups. In the present study, however, I focus on the groups that have established hegemony over the production of official memory sites, especially historiography and commemoration practices.

Followers of Michel Foucault have also called for a rereading of collective memory, historiography and, in effect, all human knowledge. Theirs is a political stance, requiring the identification of processes of construction and maintenance of collective memory within the context of the struggle for power. From the perspective of critical theory, the group possessing political and social power attempts to cast human knowledge in a form benefiting its continued hegemony.<sup>33</sup> This insight has recently prodded contemporary academic scholars to uncover the histories of groups and other voices omitted from the discourse so as to offer them an opportunity, within

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<sup>32</sup>Bar-On, M., 2001, *Written in a Book, The Beginnings of Israeli Historiography of the 1948 War*, Tel Aviv: Maarachot, Ministry of Defense, p. 15. (Hebrew)

<sup>33</sup>Foucault, M. 1973, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage.



public space, to tell the story of the marginal and the weak whose contributions have been expunged from the official narrative. A basic tenet guiding this school is Marx's allegation that the bourgeoisie refuses to study itself critically or to relinquish its unilateral view of its own history.<sup>34</sup>

Hence, in the approach adopted, history, although not necessarily official history is redefined as a subjective, political sphere. Here, "the whole truth" is not only alien, it is inadmissible. Selectivity is necessary because the writing of history must survive political barriers, struggles, and interventions. We can conclude that history is but one additional memory site used by the powerful to foster an atmosphere amenable to them. For instance, consider Bar On's comments on myth, another major memory site: "The degree of truth hidden in one or another myth is unimportant. Memory does not confront itself with what occurred in the past but with the degree of its compliance with identified factors found in the present...Collective memory is closer to myth than to documented history. What characterizes myths is the irrelevance of the any link the story might have to recorded history. Collective memory's link to historical events also plays little part, irrespective of any connection that once existed among some of its components."<sup>35</sup>

For illustrative purposes, consider historical myths. An historical myth is an interpretive mechanism that sanctifies an historical event by labeling it a universal collective experience; as such, the myth is subject to society's ongoing interpretation of its past. The social relevance of a myth is expressed by how it is incorporated into the network of private and communal rituals. More than retelling the past, a myth embodies a cultural code that exalts a distinctive set of moral values and behavioral

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<sup>34</sup>Marx, K., 1973, *Grundrisse*, London: Harmondsworth, pp. 105-106.

<sup>35</sup>Bar On, 2001, *Written in a Book. The Beginnings of Israeli Historiography of the 1948 War*. Tel Aviv: Maarachot, Ministry of Defense. (Hebrew)  
p. 29. (Hebrew)



norms. The myth's inculcation (or institutionalization) represents a mechanism for reproducing that code. Hence, a myth is, by definition, *enlisted*. The group that produces the memory site quickly creates a myth that rebuffs the memories supporting its competitors. In the case to be explored, Zionist symbolism and commemoration practices, I will show that, not surprisingly, the plethora of memory sites and myths dealing with agricultural settlement helped to engender a spirit of the time suitable to the Labor Movement agenda. These will be compared to other, competitive myths expressing other values, which were either rejected or failed to survive as official memory sites.

This analysis rests on the characterization of myth as more than historical narrative, nostalgic in temper. Myths are treated here as political assets; they represent models of political behavior approved by the ruling elites. More than minor components of socio-political reality, myths are powerful instruments for the disposition of groups in socio-political space as well as sources for that disposition's legitimation. This is possible because the political order is more than a hierarchical collection of positions and governance processes. A political order's effectiveness (as a measure of its hegemonic control) is reflected in the degree to which the population internalizes the myths that "tell" the story of society's creation and thereby rationalize the present social structure.<sup>36</sup> Mythmaking is thus an effective practice for ordering "facts," causal links, and interpretive inferences into one piece exhibiting internal logic and persuasive power, all for the sake of political goals.<sup>37</sup>

Specifically, a myth is a story; it relates momentous events that, in the act of retelling, acquire an aura of sanctity. A myth is a tale, not an objective account of historical fact; its "truth" does not rest on objective verification of its details. Instead,

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<sup>36</sup>Liebman and Don Yehiya, 1983, p. 40.

<sup>37</sup>Azaryahu, M., 1995, *State Rituals*. Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev and Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, p. 4. (Hebrew)

we are speaking of subjective truth, available for marketing to the myth's consumers. These consumers reside in the general community, beyond the bounded estates of power and influence.<sup>38</sup> This description parallels the observation made by British anthropologist I. M. Lewis: Myths "tell a big truth by means of big lies."<sup>39</sup> Occupants of key positions in society are conscious of the historical and symbolic manipulation they and their competitors perpetrate through myths. Their competitors are, however, uninterested in sustaining a universalistic vision;<sup>40</sup> instead, they are intent on introducing alternative myths into the socio-political space. As a result, only extrinsic actors, strangers to the society in question, can discover the objective truth hidden from the masses by means of myth. Moreover, the myths that enter official memory sites as authorized versions of historical truth are always associated with the current political order. As implied, myths decline not in response to public enlightenment but through replacement by alternative myths, the outcome of power struggles or contests over political hegemony. Hence, we can state that, as a rule, every narrative form of political consensus or hegemonic vision is the outcome of conflict and competition.

Since the dawn of history, elites and governing dynasties have been aware of the indispensability of myths for the preservation of their status. They thus produced primal myths that told of their rise to power and legitimated their rule. In prehistory and antiquity, this legitimacy was based on the threads woven between the ruling group's origins and divinity or divine intervention. In modernity, myths are secular: The gods have been replaced by "history." With respect to the nation-state, scholars have related primal myths to actions performed by political elites and intellectuals. The strength of these myths rests on the fact that after establishment of the regime, these myths were integrated into the popular patriotic folklore — their contents came

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Lewis, I. M., 1974, *Social Anthropology in Perspective*, New York: Harmondsworth, p. 121.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 16.



to appear natural, taken for granted. In either setting, primal myths evolved into hegemonic concepts, controlling a society's perception of its history and its experience of statehood.

It follows that immediately upon its accession to power, a political elite will initiate production of myths, using elements culled from what will be official memory sites. The memory sites will be chosen according to the myth-related roles they are meant to fulfill. These two cultural artifacts (the myths and the memory sites) will be constructed as the exclusive representatives of the elite's version of the national ethos, to be transmitted to for the future generations. It should be stressed, again, that selection is a premeditated and rational process, involving the calculated adjustment and adaptation, reproduction and recycling of materials. Yet, to repeat, the fabrication, obfuscation and plain disregard of fact does little to reduce a myth's power to arouse emotions and identification among its target population. Therein lies its strength.

As mentioned, competition over power provides the context for the production of myths. Rivalry over prestige and position is expressed here in the contest for control over the production, content, and proprietorship of national myths. During this battle, groups attempt to reinforce those myths that support their claims to preferential status at the same time that they attempt to undermine the myths supporting alternative claims.<sup>41</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of the ruling group, the preceding analysis suggests a paradoxical attitude toward the dimension of time. On one level, it is seems obvious that a group successful in its attempts to attain power should focus on the present by implementing a strategy meant to solve urgent problems and formulate a public policy suitable for the present. The same applies to the future, whether for

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<sup>41</sup>Ohana, D. and Wistreich, R.S., 1997, Myth in Judaism, Zionism and Israeliness, in Ohana, D. and Wistreich, R.S., 1997, *The Myth of Memory*. Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew)



reasons of the public interest (e.g., responsible elites make long-term investments) or for private interests (e.g., the distribution of patronage). These two time frames direct attention to a profusion of means, resources, and issues. Therefore, why look to the past? Going deeper, however, reveals that involvement with the past does not contradict the other approaches. Preoccupation with the past and its reproduction represent but one additional mechanism available for producing the spirit of the time, the sociological factor that sets the stage for ruling parties to substantiate their claims for reelection, for example.

Although such efforts do not exhaust the available historiographical materials, surprisingly, it impels the ruling elite to add commemoration of the dead to its roster of political mechanisms. This raises a further conundrum: Why should the elite turn to the dead at all? What do the dead offer that the living (and yet unborn) do not? Intuitively, all relations carried on with the dead are intimate, extra-political; they revolve around mourning, bereavement, commemoration and other means for coping that are activated on the level of the family or, in extreme circumstances, the group. The objective of this dissertation is to resolve this conundrum. In the following, I will show that the dead provide significant advantages to elites preoccupied with the maintenance of their political dominance and cultural hegemony. In terms of the analytic perspective adopted here, bereavement represents a political arena, one where the state duplicates its behavior regarding history and official memory sites. Whether intentionally or not, individuals who sacrificed their lives on the alter of national (re)birth — soldiers and their families, civilians participating in underground movements — become players in the value-allocation game manipulated by the ruling elites for their own narrow interests. During the course of this game, the dead are appropriated by the state and denied their identities as members of the private sphere.

Addressing the past offers tactical as well as strategic advantages. Dates are crucial factors because they help segregate the chosen few from the others. The nation-building enterprise was not completed by a ruling elite acting alone; other actors, including competing groups, participated in the events, each in its own way, supported by different ideas and attitudes. Some were involved in diplomatic efforts, others in waging war. We can therefore assume that the group that gained prominence with national independence was either stronger or more resilient, or perhaps its activities on the eve of declaration of autonomy were perceived as more consequential. This dominance, I will show, was the outcome, among other things, of the group's control of mechanisms formally identified with the national effort — such as leading positions in governing institutions and recognition by other major actors as the exclusive and worthy representative of the entire population.

Proceeding chronologically, upon conclusion of the nation-building enterprise, the dominant elite, once in government, is required to construct a new "national" collective memory. This means setting the date when the nation's history supposedly "began" and determining who contributed to its unfolding. If their contributions are recognized and extolled in collective memory and memory sites, their inspiring acts and fallen heroes will become standards for the coming generations.<sup>43</sup>

Establishing the national narrative's temporal framework is therefore an effective ploy for purging national myths of those actors and efforts identified with competing political factions for its creates a seemingly objective criterion for their symbolic exclusion from the enterprise. We can therefore conclude that what is generally considered to be the onset of history and its objective details — the crucial moments of the national enterprise — are essentially subjective. They reflect political

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<sup>42</sup>Yerushalmi, H. Y., 1988, *Recollection: Jewish History and Memory*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 23. (Hebrew).

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.





decisions, and are "inauthentic." Michael Young has written that any year can be considered the inaugural year of national history. It simply requires placing some events within a specific time frame and transforming them into "ours." For this process to be successful, an opening date suffused with meaning must be selected.<sup>44</sup>

Dates are likewise crucial for national bereavement and commemoration, the subjects of this dissertation. Decisions as to who will be counted among the fallen in service to the state and, it follows, which groups sacrificed their sons and daughters to the national effort are political at their core. To return to Young, this group embraces those who fell so that the nation-state could be (re)born. Casualties of the wars waged prior to the politically determined base year will be excluded from the burgeoning mythology; they will not be considered national martyrs. The groups associated with "pre-history" will be denied political as well as extra-political (i.e., cultural and economic) rewards. More to the point, recognition of their contribution to the national effort, especially in the form of the children they sacrificed, will be ignored if not purged from national consciousness.

The literature on the strategies employed by ruling elites to impose their mark during the early years of national independence is very broad in its reach. Education, health, citizenship, the establishment of democratic institutions and the public administration, and certainly creation of national security forces are major examples of such projects. However, bereavement and commemoration have been neglected for the most part,<sup>45</sup> even by students of the rebirth of the Jewish state.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Young, M., 1988, *The Metronomic Society — Natural Rhythms and Human Timetables*, London: Thames and Hudson.

<sup>45</sup>See for example Gellner, E., 1994, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

<sup>46</sup>Shapiro, Y., 1984, *An Elite Without Successors: Generations of Political Leaders In Israel*, Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim, (Hebrew); Shapiro, Y., 1989, *Chosen to Command*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved (Hebrew); Shapiro, Y. 1996, *A Society Held Captive by Its Politicians*, Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim (Hebrew); Lissak, M. and Horowitz, D., 1977, Political Recruitment and the Construction of Yishuv Institutions During the British Mandate, in M. Lissak and Horowitz, D. (eds.), *Israel's Political System*, Jerusalem: Am Oved. (Hebrew)



Bereavement is a major component of collective memory; the available literature has focused primarily on its cultural rather than political implications. From the perspective of this study, however, bereavement is a political asset, rationally constructed by political actors. This approach requires a shift in analytic focus from the individual response to *commemoration*, the mode in which an individual response is converted into a collective, nation-level response.

Since the advent of modern psychology, the preoccupation with bereavement has intensified. This discipline has deepened our understanding of how the response to loss influences people throughout their lives. The plethora of research on bereavement produced by the behavioral and social sciences can be summarized in three points:

a. *Bereavement is a private event.* Bereavement is an intimate experience, belonging to the private, familial or community realm. Numerous studies have observed and analyzed the methods by which individuals cope with tragedy on the rehabilitative, functional, and behavioral levels. Study of the subject began with Freud who, in his pioneering work, originally conducted with Breuer in the mid 1890s, described Anna O's symptoms in response to her father's fatal illness.<sup>48</sup> The characteristics of mourning described by Freud in *Mourning and Melancholy* (1917), such as the preoccupation with the deceased and the imaginative reliving of the death itself continue to serve as the foundations of the research literature.<sup>49</sup> Hence, the majority of studies dealing with bereavement have continued to focus on the individual or the deceased's family; it has only touched upon the surrounding social and cultural support systems and ignored the nation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Breuer, J. and Freud, S. 1895, *Studien uber Hysterie*. London: Gesammelte Werke, Imago.

<sup>49</sup>Freud, S., 1917, *Trauer und Melancholie*, London: Gesammelte Werke, Imago.

<sup>50</sup>See for example Caplan, G., 1974, *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 3: Loss*. New York: Basic Books.

b. *Bereavement is a temporary phenomenon.* Psychological mechanisms permit the individual to perceive his or her response to the trauma of bereavement as a short-lived although powerful experience. New habits are expected to emerge that exclude the deceased. This attitude has inspired models indicating a gradual decline in the force of the response.<sup>51</sup> Behavioral models for working through bereavement tend to rest on short-lived experiences, temporally bound and organized in progressive stages. At their termination, the situation is redefined or restructured as if the mourning period has come to its natural and obvious conclusion.

c. *Bereavement arouses emotional and irrational reactions.* The majority of approaches to bereavement have focus on affective responses to loss: anger, depression, anxiety, shame, and guilt.<sup>52</sup> Research has centered on the dynamics between thought and feeling, based on the distinction between functional cognitive thought patterns and dysfunctional bereavement-induced patterns. A further distinction was made between grief and mourning: Grief is an individual, emotional response to loss from death,<sup>53</sup> whereas mourning is a socio-cultural activity, constructed by society to mark the tragic event, a means to reintegrate survivors into the existing web of social relations.<sup>54</sup>

This being so, the shift in level to political behavior and the nation-state bids the scholar to perceive bereavement as an asset whose properties go beyond the confines set by the traditional approaches just reviewed. A rational-political approach to the phenomenon depicts bereavement as free of temporal constraints: Memories of the dead and their families' subsequent behavior become available for appropriation by the state, to be used for the benefit of its long-term political goals. This process is far

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<sup>51</sup>Parkes, C. M. and Weiss, R., 1983, *Recovery from Bereavement*, New York: Basic Books.

<sup>52</sup>See for example Raphael, B., 1983, *The Anatomy of Bereavement*, New York: Basic Books.

<sup>53</sup>Averill, J. R., 1968, Grief: Its Nature and Significance, *American Sociological Review*, 29, 358-347.

<sup>54</sup>Rosenblatt, P.C., Walsh, R. P., and Jackson, D. A., 1976, *Grief and Mourning in a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Washington, D.C.: Human Relations Area Files Press.



from spontaneous: As will be shown, bereavement, as it appears on the roster of the nation-state's instruments, represents a premeditated, calculated policy, planned and motivated by political considerations and competition between social groups whose leaders comprehend its inordinate long-term political value. We are definitely not discussing an intimate, familial, extra-political phenomenon but a public event requiring scrutiny from a purely rational-political perspective.

In its confrontation with bereavement, the nation-state has been rather innovative. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for the first time in modern history, a state-initiated organizational framework came to see itself as responsible for the burial of war casualties and their official commemoration. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, war dead were left to rot in the field, a situation that changed with the transformation of fighting forces from a collection of paid mercenaries to national armies. From then on, state agencies have seen to the burial of the war dead in military cemeteries. A humane gesture at first sight, its benefits were one-sided in the main. The state's treatment of its war dead effectively shifts the deceased out the private and into the public sphere. State burial represents appropriation of the war's victims by the community, their availability for use as public symbols, to be intensively used within the sphere of social communications. In the following, cemeteries are conceptualized as arenas for the play of politics and techniques of political communication.

Cemeteries, it will be shown, are also sites where memory is restructured by the transmission of patently political messages. Although most of these messages are implicit, they fulfill two major functions. The first relates to intensive penetration of the dead as a major constituent of collective consciousness. A precedent for this function can be found in Europe following World War I, with its millions of



casualties. During the 1920s, England, France and Germany became absorbed in commemoration of the War's human toll by means of memorial days, rituals, and the statues erected in major cities as well as remote villages. The spirit of the War's dead became an integral part of Europe's public and political existence.<sup>55</sup>

The second function is epistemological: delineation of the community's boundaries. Once the dead enter the sphere of the collective consciousness and become available as carriers of political messages, military cemeteries perpetuate their memory. This occurs not the least because those who died are labeled as members (i.e., as signifiers) of the groups credited with completing the mission of national birth or, as in the Israeli case, of rebirth. But not all the dead receive identical treatment: Official acts of commemoration are products of screening processes in which all the related events, including those taking place immediately after independence, are selected according to their contribution to the myths that support the political and military leadership. Such screening is the logical outcome of the socio-political function of military cemeteries. As memory sites, they chosen not the least for their ability to motivate the young to join the army forces, the institution that, more than any other does, expresses collective values of sacrifice and deference to the state. Victims of events that ended in tragedy, failure, or defeat, incidents potentially embarrassing to the political and military elites, may be interred in military cemeteries but excluded from mention in national myths and other memory sites. Their resurrection as national heroes, if it occurs, results from local, private initiatives, "from the bottom up," bereft of official "top down" encouragement, and often in the face of official resistance.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Mosse, G.L., 1975, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, New York: publisher; Mosse, G.L., 1981, The Martyred Soldier Ritual: National Cemeteries and the Renaissance of Nationalism, *Zmanin*, 6, (Hebrew)

<sup>56</sup>Doron and Lebel, 2000.

The link established between the individual, intimate and extra-political level, where efforts are directed toward rehabilitating the victim's family, and the exterior political level, where state intervention in bereavement is motivated by interests of power and governance, can be categorized as one of exchange.<sup>57</sup> Elevation of the dead to the status of national heroes is a mechanism contrived to compensate the victims' families for their sacrifice. Incorporation of the dead into the socio-political discourse grants the victims everlasting life on the symbolic level while it acknowledges the nation's debt to their families. The attachment of meaning to their loss and the recognition of the depth of their sacrifice, especially when the event is depicted as an ultimate act of heroism dedicated to national (re)birth, are crucial resources in the state's rehabilitate of the families.

In exchange for this gift, the victims' families accept the clear strictures on their political behavior exacted by the state. On the one hand, the families' passivity, resulting from trauma, effectively guarantees that the terms of the exchange will be kept. Alternatively, this arrangement can convert bereaved parents of victims of national insurrections and wars of independence into political activists, ready to legitimate the state's social and political undertakings. As state-designated members of the leadership's unofficial retinue, they are invited to take their place on the grandstand at public rituals and gatherings.<sup>58</sup> From this position, they dispense their children's legacy in a version prepared by agents authorized to draft that legacy as an entreaty to share in the prescribed political conduct. On the national level, bereaved parents may thus encourage young men and women to join the army in the name of the very goals for which their own children died; on the political level, they set examples regarding continued public support for and trust in the leaders who had sent

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<sup>57</sup>Doron and Lebel, 2000, *op. cit.*; Lebel, 1998, *The Political Behavior of Bereavement*, MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, Department of Political Science.

<sup>58</sup>Lebel, U. 1998.



their children to their graves. Both levels illustrate the calculated use of commemoration to secure the desired public response to the nation's challenges as conceived by the political elite. To illustrate this process, consider a statement made by one Israeli Chief of the General Staff at the inauguration of a memorial park dedicated to War of Independence dead: "They gave us independence, their bequeathed to us a tradition of bravery, readiness to sacrifice, and burning faith...Their legacy...is our readiness to sacrifice everything for the sake of Israel's independence."<sup>59</sup>

In their construction of collective memory and memory sites, political elites recruit a group's dead as they recruit its history. The preoccupation with bereavement, bereaved families, commemoration and the incidents during which lives were lost has an important place in the network of rational political behavior we are discussing. Importantly, this preoccupation is also the result of a decision. The respective activities represent the realization of a crucial decision impinging upon the public's perception of the evolving nation-state's political structure. The choice of victims and events included in the repertoire of commemoration activities is meant to establish a clear equivalence between those individuals and events and the elites presented as responsible for the independence project.

Contrary to Azrayahu, who argues that commemoration rituals treat "all those who fell in battle," meaning that the decision of who is remembered is made from below, I suggest that the decision is made from above. The outcome of this selection is state control of a major symbolic asset: official designation of an individual's — and hence his community's — inclusion in a revered group, that responsible for the nation's birth. This asset endows political legitimacy to those groups who, interested

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<sup>59</sup>Gen. Yigael Yadin, Israel's Chief of the General Staff, 3 April 1951, speech made at the unveiling of the war memorial located at the Gan Anavim Military Cemetery, commemorating the casualties of the Har-El Brigade, IDF Archives, unnumbered file.



in achieving that status and access to its (political) resources, base their claims on their sacrifices to this sacred cause. Hence, bereavement can become a mechanism for defining the collective's inclusive boundaries, delineated in the national narrative, and justifying the political hegemony wielded by its elites. Alternatively, those groups whose bereavement is driven to the periphery of public consciousness, whose grief is excluded from the national narrative and commemoration, receive no such recognition; their personal but mainly historical contribution to the national enterprise is denigrated. State denial of the other's bereavement is thus political in character: It channels access to the political and social resources sequestered by the hegemonic elite.

### **Commemoration of Bereavement — The Strategy of Symbolic Manipulation**

How is the political use of bereavement realized and how is the linkage between bereavement and collective memory constructed? The study of collective memory focuses on identification of political messages and their content as determined by the producers of those messages and memories. However, we should not ignore another important aspect of the phenomenon: the practices that make memory possible.<sup>60</sup> I refer to those mechanisms — many more of which, in number and effectiveness, are available to ruling as opposed to other groups — by means of which ideas and myths penetrate social channels of communication and become accepted as normative, that is, institutionalized. A political elite interested in preserving its status cannot be content with producing a "sociological factor" favorable to it; it must actively distribute this factor throughout society.

Based on their awareness of the key contribution made by memory sites to regime continuity, scholars intent on studying the political bargaining conducted over the boundaries of the state must also focus on the bargaining that accompanies control over memory sites: national rituals, stamps, street names, customs, holidays, memorial days, and textbooks. We would therefore expect to find a heated political debate conducted between the groups controlling access to those sites and its contents (i.e., those holding the reins of power) and those groups denied access to those sites. We can also assume that the heat of such debates bears witness to the political stakes involved.

In the literature on national memory, the concept *commemoration* is applied to the mechanism that, through channels of social communication, integrates fragments of the historical past by stressing their salience to the experience of the present and

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<sup>60</sup>Connerton, P., 1990, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

future. Commemoration can be described as the cumulative product of disparate strands from the past, woven into a uniform narrative. This narrative supports the story of national genesis distributed by the political elite at the same time that it provides fertile territory for the reproduction of the social and political order. Consider the term *military heritage*, one of the standard mechanisms used by the nation-state to invoke national unity. According to Mordechai Bar On, a former IDF Chief Education Officer and one of the first to apply the term in the context of Israeli nation-building, this phrase was never intended to refer to the lessons learned from particular battles or assessments made of specific campaigns. Instead, the term relates to "narratives of battles used as didactic stories focusing on values...morale...pride in one's unit and loyalty to the army...sacrifice, solidarity." Thus, according to Bar On, construction of a military heritage entails "selective memory." Such a process demands, in his view, "rigorous selection of those same 'memories' that support the desired message." He also argues that this process involves more than *memory* and *recall*; it also requires *forgetting* and *generating forgetfulness*: "Memories will always be found that support and construct meaning; however, memories also exist that undermine these memories and offer to replace them with alternative or contradictory meanings."<sup>61</sup>

The study of commemoration has been nurtured by the work of Emil Durkheim who wrote that commemoration preserves and exalts traditional beliefs and attitudes, reinforces their existence, and reproduces the status of the social agents that distribute them. As the perceived validity of these beliefs increases, the probability that they will forfeit their place in society's collective memory decreases; as a result, basic values and their foundations are strengthened. According to Durkheim, the cult

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<sup>61</sup>Bar On, 2001, p. 37.



of commemoration, like any religion, kneels not before the Almighty but before society. Society is fortified in the process.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, from the functionalist point of view, commemoration, in all its facets, represents assets that support the public's confrontation with trauma and loss, provides the glue of social consolidation, and produces a unique national identity. Such a process was recognized in the collective commemoration rites conducted in Britain following World War I. It began in the schools, the colleges and military units, and was accompanied by public pressure to observe Armistice Day as the nation's official memorial day. At the same time, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was erected. This memorial soon became a hallowed site for communion with the dead, visited by the entire public, not just bereaved families.<sup>63</sup> In Israel as well the demand to build memorials began from the "bottom."<sup>64</sup> Based on this observation, Azaryahu maintains that national commemoration is democratic in nature, a collective act in which all members of society participate. However, by persisting in this line of argument, Azaryahu continues to ignore the simultaneous exclusion of certain groups from participation in those commemorative practices.

On a superficial level, national rituals are universally used to impart a sense of communal authenticity, of collective or national unity. Creating authenticity is thus a major objective for producers of national communities. The specific forms these rituals take are derived from the images and attitudes found within the operative cultural space. Nevertheless, although it tends to be a product of defined (though potentially variable) political interests, the unity represented by these rituals functions as a cornerstone for all competing national ideologies. The latter continue to be

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<sup>62</sup>Durkheim, E., 1912, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York: Free Press.

<sup>63</sup>Malkinson, R. and Witztum, E. 1993, Bereavement and commemoration: The dual sides of the national myth, in R. Malkinson, R. Rubin, and E. Witztum (eds.), *Loss and Bereavement in Israeli Society*, Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense. (Hebrew)

<sup>64</sup>Azaryahu, 1995.

perceived as fundamental, taken-for-granted, objective facts. Hence, national unity sustains the political demands made in the name of society. In parallel, the founding fathers are aware, if only implicitly, that such unity must be molded, safeguarded, and more than anything else, expressed on the symbolic level.

National rituals are, therefore, outstanding examples of the processes at the core of nation-building projects. They do not burst forth spontaneously as inventions born of a national spirit or collective identity. Rituals are products of complex political processes. According to Azaryahu, two stages are involved: first, definition of the needs to be fulfilled and choice of the ritual's subject; second, institutionalization and choice of agents. Regarding the first stage, this represents a self-conscious choice among options competing for priority within the cultural space. The choice is therefore political, motivated by the needs of those responsible for determining national identity and, accordingly, the meanings they wish to attach to that national identity. With respect to the second stage, the specific course institutionalization takes is determined by the social communication channels and agents available and/or acceptable to the public at large.

National rituals therefore potently illustrate the intricacy of commemoration. To repeat, commemoration is not only a means for transforming collective memory into political culture, it is also a mechanism for translating memory into political attitudes. Commemoration is an instrument, available to the authors of a nation's political culture for the presentation of desired attitudes as natural, matter of fact, and real.<sup>65</sup> As Nachman Ben Yehuda writes: "[t]he word 'remember' has a dual meaning:

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<sup>65</sup>Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T., 1972, *The Social Construction of Reality*, New York: Penguin; Dahrendorf, R., 1966, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.



the first, to recollect; the second, to commemorate."<sup>66</sup> William Baumol argues in turn that the two meanings are permanently and cyclically interrelated: The way in which a memory or event is recalled determines the manner in which it is commemorated, the elements emphasized and those effaced and therefore forgotten. It follows that producers of commemoration rituals revive images taken from collective memory, an act that influences the way the original event will be recalled in the future. As Shamir writes: "The [war] memorials' initiators were asked ... to include the fallen among the remembered, a group immersed in the past, having participated in building the homeland."<sup>67</sup> Those who participated in building the nation can legitimately, we may assume, expect to participate in managing it.

Intensive observation of commemoration reveals yet another story. Even if the demand to erect a commemorative monument came from below, the state appropriates the activity for the benefit of the ruling elite despite the fact that we are dealing with a consensual project. In cases where a memorial's fundamental message is problematic for the ruling elite — because the elite would prefer to erase the event or hero from the collective memory — the government will make every attempt to either prevent its construction or to limit its access to social channels of communication. Using the public's need for symbolic rituals, a pattern is contrived for nationalization of memories of the dead in favor of the current regime.

From the point of the political elite — the very same groups responsible for drafting the official interpretive package — this process enlarges its political capital thusly: The fallen identified with favored groups receive preferential treatment in the form of official commemoration while those belonging to peripheral or competitive

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<sup>66</sup>Ben-Yehuda, N., 1995, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p. 272.

<sup>67</sup>Shamir, I., 1989, *The Eternal Flame: Memorials to the Martyrs of Israel's Wars*, Tel Aviv: Maarachot, Ministry of Defense, p. 34. (Hebrew)



groups receive fleeting if any mention. This increases the elite's standing among the groups honored and thus its implicit control over those same groups. Schwartz and Vagner-Pacifici, in their study of Vietnam War memorials, discuss this process in terms of the ambivalence and political trials associated with commemoration of events that undermine the political hegemony of the governing elite but which cannot be ignored due to their scope and attendant trauma.<sup>68</sup>

In general, state commemoration reflects the political elite's attitude toward the period and figures commemorated. Hence, changes in government inaugurate changes in the spirit behind commemoration projects: The needs of different elite groups must now be met. Schwartz describes how the meanings of historical events changed in the wake of modifications in prevailing social attitudes and how these transformations influenced the construction of the memorials built on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.<sup>69</sup> In a similar light, Mayo categorizes US war memorials according to whether they commemorate what are considered just or unjust wars, victories or defeats. As he views it, both types can exist side-by-side as part of what he terms "the conflict over memory." Conceptions of what type of memorial to erect, dedicated to which event, and within what framework vary over time because the "truth" in whose name the memorial was built construction changes with time.<sup>70</sup> It follows that attempts to obliterate any mention of rival groups from memorials and other memory sites carry the seeds of those groups' re-entry into the discourse at some later date.

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<sup>68</sup>Schwartz, B. and Vagner-Pacifici, R., 1989, The Vietnam Memorials, *American Image*, 44, 315-320. In their study of Vietnam War memorials, the authors discuss this process in terms of the ambivalence and political trials associated with commemoration of events that undermine the political hegemony of the governing elite. The quandary arises when these events, though threatening, cannot be ignored due to their scope and attendant trauma

<sup>69</sup>Schwartz, B., 1975, Social Changes and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington, *American Sociological Review*.

<sup>70</sup>Mayo, J. 1988, *War Memorials as Political Landscapes*, New York: Praeger.

Memorials and flags, national cemeteries and commemorative rites, street names and stamps are political symbols strategically positioned to invent an "imagined community" in Anderson's terms.<sup>71</sup> These symbols refer to those of the community's former members who have no bodily substance, that is, the dead. This community links the past with the present and the future by specifying who contributed and who, through martyrdom, purchased controlling shares in the nation-building project (the past); who can and who cannot legitimately hold the reins of power (the present); and finally, which party will achieve dominance on the basis of the first two factors (the future).

Among the symbolic mechanisms available, we have selected the following on the basis of their proximity to the political processes described.

### **National Heroes**

The creation of national heroes is a highly effective political strategy. These heroes — the nation's forefathers and brave fighters who fell in the struggle to achieve independence — are all identified either at the time of their courageous acts or as a result of events following their deaths with ruling political ideologies and movements. Lipset, in his article on the rise of civil religion, cites two basic scenarios. In the US, a uniform homogeneous culture arose that incorporated reverence for the "founding fathers" such as Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt and the values they represented. In contrast to this case, which displays a political culture where leaders of every political persuasion express respect for the same set of founding fathers, Lipset

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<sup>71</sup>Anderson, B., 1991, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, imprint of New Left Books, pp. 16-17.



suggests the case of Europe, where right and left distribute distinctive symbols: heroes, dates, historical truths, and myths.<sup>72</sup>

Determination of who authored the political order's narrative is an act of exegesis, a practice meant to "enlighten" future generations. The process responds to a vital question associated with construction of collective identity and memory sites, specifically: What heroes and values spearheaded establishment of the state? Public responses to these heroes and values will be akin to those celebrating the Greek *polis*, where rites for the veneration of the founding fathers were transformed into rituals celebrating the city as a political entity. Modern examples are the cults of personality surrounding Lenin, George Washington, and William Tell. These figures' monopolization (i.e., cultural hegemony) of the contents of texts, stamps, and street names induces acceptance of the self-serving thesis, put forth by the parties in power, that their "historical" association with these icons and "national values" legitimates the existing political order and their exclusive control of the state.

### **Commemorative Monuments**

Construction of commemorative monuments is a common practice throughout the world. Because of their physical longevity, monuments provide lasting testimony to how events and casualties are etched in each period's collective memory. To guarantee that these complex projects indeed operate as sites for mass pilgrimage, these complex projects require intricate and careful planning, licenses obtained from numerous government agencies, often huge budgets and long-term investment in their maintenance. Inevitably, only governments or ruling elites are capable of such undertakings. This is especially true when the subject of the monument is nationalistic

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<sup>72</sup>Lipset, S., cited in Ohana, D. and Wistreich, R.S., 1997, *The Myth of Memory*, Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, pp.11-41. (Hebrew)



in nature and fixed on the public agenda, whether in the area of education, tourism, official rituals, and the protocol of state visits. For instance, following World War I, an unprecedented number of monuments — 38,000 in all — initiated by local governments and veterans associations throughout the France, carry the names of the dead and are infused with the republican spirit of sacrifice.<sup>73</sup> The penetration of monuments into the fabric of public life may be what motivated Annette Becker to place them into the category of "official art."<sup>74</sup> Hobsbawm, who studied monuments constructed in Europe during the period 1870-1914, maintains that this is a process producing tradition.<sup>75</sup> He argued that socio-political transformations necessitated the creation of new tools by the elite to reinforce their control and to guarantee loyalty. One substitute for the unifying glue formerly provided by the church and the crown was found in the mechanism of commemoration, with monuments functioning as the durable pegs for its expression.

### **Military Cemeteries**

The earliest military cemeteries combined the sublime values of the French Enlightenment with the practical considerations of sanitation. The French Revolution's leaders encouraged arranging graves in rows because the ideal of equality was to be maintained in the cemetery as it was in the city.<sup>76</sup> France's other commemorative projects followed this principle to some degree: Its Armistice Day is celebrated as its memorial day; Independence Plaza at Verdun and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier attract countless pilgrims of every rank. Yet, prior to World War I,

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<sup>73</sup>Sivan, E. 1991, *The Generation of 1948: Myth, Image and Memory*, Tel Aviv: Maarchot, Ministry of Defense. (Hebrew)

<sup>74</sup>Becker, A., 1987, *Les Monuments aux Mort*, Paris: Errance.

<sup>75</sup>Hobsbawm, E., 1983, Mass Production of Tradition: Europe 1870-1914, in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 263-307.

<sup>76</sup>Mosse, 1981, The Martyrs Ritual: National Cemeteries and the Renaissance of Nationalism, *Zmanim*, 20, 3-14. (Hebrew)

soldiers were buried in common graves at the place of their demise. Only the graves of their commanders were awarded special attention. In 1915, civilian cemeteries were differentiated from military cemeteries for the first time.

But military cemeteries are nonetheless special: They are official sites for rituals, visited by the masses — schoolchildren, soldiers and their families, bereaved parents and siblings — but also politicians, military and civilian leaders, on national memorial days in particular. Speeches are made and homage is paid to the dead. The dead are extolled as the nation's benefactors, worthy of mention in the nation's history books. However, there are those who, for one reason or another, but especially if they died prior to the nation's official anniversary, are denied burial in military cemeteries by the nation's leaders. Excluded from this official site, the outcasts are bereft of any possibility to enjoy the status extended to their rivals in the collective's imagined community.

### **Memorial Day Rituals**

Memorial day rituals are among the most effective channels available for transmission of political and normative messages by the state. It is obvious that the state pours considerable effort into planning and mounting these events. Official rituals are funded by the state; its senior officials, especially representatives of the ministries of defense, education and culture, address the audience in well-staged appearances; the logistics involved with transportation guarantee that huge crowds will attend and imbibe in the messages to be distributed. Memorial day rituals are, in short, optimal platforms for the distribution of the new state's version of national history.

The audience's anonymity does not preclude the effectiveness of these events as a means of communication. An individual's identity is far less important than the

act of participation in a social communications network: Anyone can make the pilgrimage to the founding fathers' graves, view the monuments and experience the force of the messages conveyed. Participation can be immediate by physically visiting the site, or vicariously, through the media.

It deserves to be stressed that contrary to the time frame indicated by their title, the crucial political significance of memorial days is their relationship to the present, "real time" as Yerushalmi refers to it. The story commemorated — its heroes, order of events, motives and outcomes — is routinely repeated every year. This consistency creates, in effect, a convention for the transmission of political messages.<sup>77</sup> Yerushalmi therefore concludes that memorial day rituals are among the most potent vehicles available for the reinforcement of collective memory.<sup>78</sup>

### **Official Commemorative (*Yizkor*) Literature**

As early as the Middle Ages, Jewish communities throughout the world introduced several practices for the construction and maintenance of collective memory, two of which are especially relevant to our subject. The first practice, developed within the framework of spiritual-literary texts, involved preparation of volumes of prayers and hymns; these responded to the need to preserve and distribute Jewish religious memory. The second practice, preparation of commemorative volumes — termed *Yizkor* after the liturgical prayer for the dead — was particularly popular among Ashkenazi (European) communities. These volumes documented the history of local persecution and pogroms; they were read to worshippers from synagogue pulpits and preserved in Jewish archives.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Yerushalmi, 1988, p. 28.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-73.



A distinctive feature of commemoration after the rise of the modern nation-state is the appearance of commemorative volumes in their civic context. These volumes are produced either privately, by the victim's family, friends, or military unit, or publicly, by state agencies. When published by the latter, these volumes are generalized, dedicated to all the war dead having some connection to the particular institution. The different types of commemorative volumes may somewhat overlap. But one aspect links all the entries in the various categories of official literature: They omit the names of those not buried in official sites. The significance of this exclusion lies in the fact that these authorized memory sites — school textbooks and especially as documents found in the national libraries — are treated as sacred texts, recalling those who died for the sake of other citizens. Hence, exclusion from these texts ensures exclusion from the nation's collective memory.

The imagined community of the dead therefore endures by means of repetitive mechanisms that enable living members of the community to experience them on symbolic and affective levels. Among these mechanisms we can list the agents that facilitate, for the living, attempts to overcome discontinuities in space and barriers of time so as to establish direct contact between the two communities. The device employed by social agents to bridge these gaps are the channels of social communication that allow community members to be concurrently present in all the time frames chosen by the respective social agent. As an "editor," the agent determines what is relevant and thus what can be excluded from the content and experience of collective memory.

### **Establishing Legitimacy: The Function of Memory Sites**

This survey of selected memory sites raises some basic questions pertaining to the political manipulation of culture: Why use memory? What outcomes does national bereavement, as a sociological factor, generate? Why is it so necessary an instrument for an elite wishing to maintain its rule following establishment of the nation-state?

As Weber wrote that, the foundations of government rest on the legitimacy awarded its rulers. Collective memory, but especially bereavement, casts the foundations of that legitimacy. This legitimacy rests on the past, not on the present. Stated differently, the quality of a regime and its decisions are not gauged by the effectiveness of its economic, infrastructure, or defense policy but by its sacrifice and loyalty to the nation's past, to the historical "controlling share" that rationalizes dominance in the present. Hence, legitimacy need not be awarded to the present government through the vote. Crises of legitimacy arise when none of the groups competing for power have access to the political system in the interim.<sup>80</sup> In the case where the current government is a continuation of the regime operating during the pre-state period, opposition parties are denied access to the system and experience a crisis of this sort. They remain, as before, outside the centers of power and influence.

We are in effect referring to an attempt to sustain these competitors exclusion from the centers of power by labeling them as illegitimate. This campaign is waged by manipulatively diverting the public's attention away from the array of solutions to current problems offered by the competing groups and shifting that attention towards the regime's self-serving interpretation of its rivals' past decisions and conduct.

Assume that the contest for political power in the present is an open game, the object of the public's attentive review of arguments, decisions and programs. In such

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<sup>80</sup>Lipset cited in Ohana, D. and Wistreich, R., 1997, Myths in Judaism, Zionism and Israeliness, in: D. Ohana and R. Wistreich (eds.), *The Myth of Memory*, Jerusalem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad., p. 170. (Hebrew)



circumstances, failed government moves immediately trigger alternative proposals by the opposing player, again to be assessed by the public. In the type of political context studied here, the past is not a game played according to the rules of free competition; it is open to manipulation by the party in power. The ruling party can determine the dominant images, play up or play down events, and purchase — with the assets it controls by virtue of its current location in the system — an image as the sole sacrificial lamb placed on the collective alter of national independence.

As to the actions taken during the nation's infancy, the dominant party is, by necessity, the only party open to criticism of its management of the state by the fact of its position and the responsibility exercised. The role of opposition parties is to criticize, identify failures, and point out defective policies from their position outside the governing structure as parties free of any direct responsibility for governing. Given that, the ruling party's investment in the past will cushion it from the effects of the often justifiable criticisms made in the present because the narrative of past accomplishments and sacrifices implanted in collective memory dwarfs the current censure.

It is within this context that state delegitimation of opponents proceeds. Put briefly, delegitimation is a political instrument available to the elite for the preservation of its hegemony. The strategy accompanying its use is marked by the attempt of political actors to vitiate their rivals' symbolic assets. To the degree that they succeed, their rivals' arguments and claims will be assessed not by their substance but by the image thrust upon them as unworthy of obtaining power.

As a policy, delegitimation proceeds by elite manipulation of the rival party's social definition. This requires initiation of a campaign of labeling and stigmatization of the target groups. Such campaigns resemble those waged by the authorities against



underground movements.<sup>81</sup> Occasionally, this state of affairs represents an outgrowth of the network of political relations established prior to independence, when the ruling and opposition parties had either shared authority or been members of the same underground movement. Once the shared goal of statehood is achieved, the dormant competition is free to erupt. In most cases, therefore, delegitimation programs tend to be aimed at groups and parties from the present that are perceived as threatening the dominant party's political hegemony in the future.

A related, interesting issue is the reversal in strategies adopted by each party immediately upon achievement of their national goals. During the struggle for independence, opposition groups or parties are preoccupied by attempts to present alternatives (i.e., delegitimize the commonly accepted agenda) for the purpose of differentiating one from the other. Following independence, the leading group, now the dominant party, initiates a program of delegitimation to protect its position of power. At the same time, their rivals seek the legitimation necessary for entry into the main camp in order to integrate themselves among the elites.

The purpose of delegitimation following statehood is not to eliminate the rival parties but to control them, to direct and influence them. Paradoxically, delegitimation (or effective stigmatization) intensifies the dominant party's demands for voter legitimation.<sup>82</sup> The outcome is what Schor terms a "stigma contest,"<sup>83</sup> a competition over negative images. Success is achieved when the rivals are perceived as *deviant* in the sociological sense of the word. After all, deviance is an outcome of the reciprocities maintained between social groups and an individual or subgroup defined

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<sup>81</sup>Schor, cited in Resnick, 1988, *Underground Movements in Segmented Societies: A Sociological Portrait of Lehi*, unpublished MA thesis, Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, Department of Sociology, p. 57. (Hebrew)

<sup>82</sup>Marx, G. T., 1976, Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participation: The Agent Provocateur and the Informants. *American Journal of Sociology*, 80(2), 503-440.

<sup>83</sup>Cited in Resnick, 1988.

by that group as violating its laws or strongly held norms. We should remember that this process is subjective, not objective. The deviant, illegitimate groups do not necessarily challenge authority or society; yet, the label sticks.<sup>84</sup> Goffman's observations confirm that the contests over legitimacy and stigmatization conducted between political rivals are waged on symbolic levels, a process described by Gusfield as a "symbolic crusade."<sup>85</sup>

Within this environment, the dominant party retains superiority over the others because it commands the channels of social communication. It has more effective access to the press, theatre, film and, especially, state commemoration and the production of collective memory by legislative means. In effect, this is a struggle over the right to manipulate information and knowledge.<sup>86</sup>

The concept of legitimation is particularly salient to any analysis of the relations between parties and groups in democracies. Weber argued that the state is the only entity with the capacity to claim exclusivity over the legitimate use of force. His discussion of the concept *control* is essentially an exploration of legitimacy. A regime, in his view, cannot base itself solely on coercion or obedience to orders; the continuity of control (or rule) rests on agreed-upon claims to legitimacy. A regime that fails to abide by the conditions of these claims will either collapse or face difficulties when functioning. Legitimacy is thus rooted in the means of violence and policies over use, the control over both of which are exclusively reserved to those groups who have already proved their loyalty and their trustworthiness when using violence in the struggle for independence and their defense of the state.

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<sup>84</sup>Goffman, A., 1980, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Tel Aviv: Dvir (Hebrew edition); see also Goffman, A., 1983, *Stigma*, Tel Aviv: Reshafim. (Hebrew edition)

<sup>85</sup>Gusfield, J. R., 1966, *Symbolic Crusade*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

<sup>86</sup>Turk, A. T., 1982, *Political Criminality*. San Diego: Sage.



Weber does enlarge upon the use of collective myths and images in the acquisition of legitimacy, although not in those words. He distinguishes between justification and legitimacy. Whereas justification represents the claims rulers make, legitimacy is the subjects' willingness to accept those claims. Stated differently, justification flows top down while legitimacy flows bottom up. We are thus referring to communication, a process composed of two main elements: transmission of a message and its reception. The effectiveness of the message, from the standpoint of the transmitting agent is, obviously, gauged by the proximity and fit of its reception by the recipient. The message's effectiveness declines in direct proportion to the distance between the two. The content of the respective messages delegitimizes the rival groups by claiming that any part they played in the glorious independence project was marginal and far from heroic. From the perspective of the regime, manipulation of the spirit of the time — the explicit identification of the dominant party, its leading figures and soldiers with that spirit, together with control over historiography and the other symbolic processes referred to previously — if properly managed, awards political legitimacy to the regime while it denies legitimacy to its rivals.

In the period reviewed in this dissertation, when the foundations of Israel's political system were laid, the efforts expended in labeling — for the purpose of legitimating and delegitimizing — came to exert their influence for decades. During this period, the nation's institutions were constructed. Subsequent to its conclusion, individual actors and political parties distilled the traumas of the War of Independence, a war was to become a heroic chapter in the nation-building opus. The party that could securely associated itself with the events — that identified itself with the spirit of the time — was bound to gain political ascendance especially if it was



able to expunge rival parties from that same opus. The decisions and attitudes emerging with statehood and the public administration — during the phase of *organizational charisma*, according to Weber — would accompany the progressive institutionalization and inculcation of the attendant organizational and political culture. The impacts of the normative and political influence exerted by those would become an indelible part of Israel's socio-political landscape.

### **Construction of Collective Boundaries**

The construction of commemorative rituals, as described above, had long-term effects on Israel as a nation-state. What were these impacts? How did they influence the political culture and political reality of the nation during the institutionalization phase of its governance structure, subsequent to the phase of organizational charisma? These questions return us to Lipset's statement that a major test of legitimacy is the appearance of a *secular political culture*, what others have termed the *civil religion of the state*, involving the creation and management of state rituals and holidays. Continuing this line of thought, collective commemoration represents acts that produce political legitimacy for its authors, the dominant party.

Don Handelman argues that state rituals are none other than official, written versions of the community's social and moral order. As such, they represent important elements in the determination of the society's cultural space and its boundaries.<sup>87</sup> Erickson defines society as a community with protected boundaries.<sup>88</sup> These boundaries, he argues, are symbolic; they define the collective's identity. Yet boundaries are dynamic, open to change; they are constantly being redrawn as a result

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<sup>87</sup>Handelman, D. and Shamgar-Handelman, L., 1997. The Presence of Absence: The Memorialism of National Death in Israel. in E. Ben-Ari and Y. Bilu (eds.), *Grasping Land: Spaces and Places in Contemporary Israel*, Albany: SUNY, pp. 85-128.

<sup>88</sup>Erickson, K. T., 1964. Notes on the Sociology of Deviance in H. Becker (ed.), *The Other Side*, New York: The Free Press, pp. 9-21.

of bargaining between social control agents and non-conformists, between guardians of the status quo and those intent on changing it. A community's boundaries thus simultaneously express and symbolize its values. With respect to death and bereavement, the conflict surrounding their substance and representation in commemoration indicate their centrality to the community's sense of being, to its identity — otherwise, there would be no conflict. Two other examples elucidate the meaning of this concept: The rate of property crimes indicates the importance of property to the community; conflicts over authority and compliance indicate the centrality of authority and compliance.

Applying Handelman's and Erickson's concepts, we can redefine the nation-building enterprise as an attempt to draw the boundaries and collective identity of a community whose boundaries are still amorphous. Societies found at this stage are characterized by conflicts between groups and perspectives waged over the community's boundaries, conflicts that invite labeling groups as deviant, stigmatization, and political delegitimation.<sup>89</sup>

Returning to Weber, he views *social closure* as the process initiated by social groups to reinforce their advantages. Social closure entails the restriction of access to assets and opportunities to a circumscribed circle of those eligible (i.e., those considered deserving of such access). This is a carefully thought-out process, during which social attributes are compared and weighed with respect to how they support the political exclusion of other groups. Weber continues: Any subgroup trait— race, language, social or religious affiliation — can serve as a vehicle for the management of access to opportunities and assets.<sup>90</sup> In the case explored here, the respective assets

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<sup>89</sup>Resnick, 1988, p. 62.

<sup>90</sup>Weber, M., cited in Aron, R., 1965, Max Weber, in R. Aron (ed.), 1965, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, New York, Basic Books.



were primarily land, exclusive information, and weapons,<sup>91</sup> regulations governing health services and employment as well as the concentration of wealth (state monopolies and oligopolies). However, the insight at the heart of the study is that even in the area of bereavement and official memory, a similar dynamic operates: bereavement and death can likewise be treated as political assets and manipulated.

I suggest that politicization of this sort applies to every aspect of the metaphors produced during the elaboration of collective memory; in the process, it assigns attributes to groups along the dimension of participation or non-participation in the national independence project. This process resembles Weber's observations regarding exclusion or, as he terms it, delegitimation: It portrays the political competition that culminates in denying access to social and economic opportunities to rival groups and their political representatives.<sup>92</sup> Thus, social closure shapes society's distribution system (inclusion and exclusion) and certainly its power relations and political culture.

Frank Parkin, who extended Weber's analysis of the politics as exclusion and the construction of socio-political closure, argues that this analysis should not be limited to the dominant group, that which erects the exclusionary barriers. At least as fascinating are the behaviors and strategies adopted by those excluded.<sup>93</sup>

This is Parkin's challenge to the scholar: To examine the responses of those excluded to the experience of exclusion. This involves an analysis of the construction and use of the symbolic instruments discussed, all of which were initiated by the ruling elite to preserve its political dominance. Weber, too, states that we can

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<sup>91</sup>Parkin, F. 1979, *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>92</sup>Aron, 1965.

<sup>93</sup>Parkin, 1979.



anticipate initiation of reciprocal responses to exclusionary acts.<sup>94</sup> As Neuwirth indicates, Weber elaborates this concept in his discussion of the behavior to be anticipated by those suffering from exclusion, the group that Neuwirth calls the underprivileged,<sup>95</sup> those directly affected by the exclusionary strategies applied.

According to Parkin, the feature that distinguishes exclusionary closure from social closure is *subordination*, a political process that inevitably leads to the creation of social categories marking their occupants as "ineligible," "excluded," or "barred" from some social act or asset. Parkin stresses that exclusionary closure involves acts of downwardly directed power, that is, political strategies initiated by the ruling party that produces, by necessity, a group, status, or layer of people who are defined through legislation as discriminated against or inferior. The latter, by the very imposition of this status, are forced to adopt strategies derived from this definition and to initiate, in Parkin's words, acts of upwardly directed power in order to gain access to a larger portion of assets. By doing so, they invariably threaten the preferred status of those who define themselves as "superior."

We are speaking of a veritable challenge to the recognized system of social distribution, as well as to the normative justifications of that system. Application of this analytic perspective discloses a phenomenon that I term *the politics of symbols*, the persistent competition waged among rational political actors. This concept describes a situation where the dominant party attempts to preserve its political status by exploiting the advantages of dominance, that is, access to the symbolic materials that sustain dominance: collective memory, bereavement and sacrifice among those identifying themselves with the dominant party, and the delegitimation of political rivals. These will be manipulated according to the party's changing needs. If this

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Cited in Parkin, 1979.

process is realized, the ruling party's rivals will be erased from the official narrative of statehood and blocked from re-entering. At the same time, opposition parties, excluded from active participation in mainstream politics, will remain preoccupied with legitimating themselves, with attempts to introduce its heroes into the national opus, and with threatening the long-term interests of the ruling elite.

### **The Politics of Symbols**

Gusfield and his colleagues differentiate between *class politics*, which include the formal political arena, the framework in which groups tend to their constituents' economic interests (e.g., budgeting, patronage, regulation), and *status politics*, the mechanisms by which the symbolic conflict over prestige and image is waged within the public discourse. It appears that class politics represents the everyday practice of politics, the concrete mechanisms by which the dominant party's regime is preserved in the short run. In the vocabulary of political science, we are referring to practices of coalition formation. In contrast, status politics involves the play of symbols, whose fruits will be reaped only in the long run. Both types of politics are geared toward the same goals but function in different time frames.

There is little doubt that during the infancy of the nation-state, as opposed to situations where the dominant party is long established, the ruling elite is preoccupied with simultaneously controlling both political dimensions, that of class and that of status, that of practice and that of symbol. The ability to do so is based on the new political structure's monopolistic access to two mechanisms, the one distributing economic, administrative, and political rewards, the other producing collective symbols, historiography and memory sites. Opposition parties, due to their location far from crucial positions of power and hence bereft of any access to distribution

systems for concrete goods, are almost totally preoccupied with status politics, with symbolic justification of their position. They will continue to struggle for the prestige they believe was groundlessly denied them by the dominant party.<sup>96</sup>

Contrary to class politics, which are open to pragmatism and compromise, status politics are conducted as a zero-sum game. Allocation of prestige to one group automatically denies prestige to another. Acknowledgement of the efforts and sacrifices of the opposition party in the independence project undermines the added value of those acts for the ruling party's reelection. Hence, this type of political contest stimulates hyperbole in the content as well as style of the engagement. The debate over national myths and political symbols sheds its pragmatic character. Instead of concrete answers to concrete questions, instead of bureaucratic politics conducted in parliamentary committees and behind-the-scenes bargaining, political leaders become engrossed in symbols. Competition is fierce and sensational, with the public square converted into the preferred scene for dramatic campaigning.

In these settings, politicians gifted with rhetorical flare create what Sperber terms a *symbolic discourse*, whose content revolves around glorification of the myths pertaining to the speaker's party and denigration of the myths related to its rivals.<sup>97</sup> A symbolic discourse rejects moderation. The contenders' attributes are dichotomized: Politics becomes a struggle waged between good and evil, saints and sinners, patriots and traitors, categories typifying debates held in the mass media for the purpose of enlisting public opinion in conflict resolution.

### **Summary**

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<sup>96</sup>Gusfield, 1966.

<sup>97</sup>Sperber, D., 1975, *Rethinking Symbolist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 6.



According to the self-interest approach to politics, public policy serves group interests, by definition. Policy issues are resolved only when they further particularistic self-interests. This contrasts with the public interest approach, which claims that public policy serves the general public.<sup>98</sup>

It appears that every society, especially in its infancy, experiences a period in which an active civil society and the separation of power characteristic of the western liberal tradition are absent or inchoate. Its politicians hold this society captive. Israeli society, according to Yonathan Shapiro, fits this description.<sup>99</sup> These conditions likewise fulfill the requirements for what Alessandro Pizzomo calls *absolutist politics*.<sup>100</sup> This type of political regime dictates the rules of behavior in every major arena of civil life, imposes normative standards throughout, and defines a single version of the truth. Absolutist politics also contains a transcendental element, marked by a significant dose of sacrality.<sup>101</sup> In order to identify the dominant actors on the stage of absolutist politics, scholars must set their gaze toward center stage. As Yonathan Shapiro noted in the introduction to his study of Israel following independence, his guiding assumption was that political parties are the major organizations operating in a democratic country; in order to grasp a nation's structure of control, we must first understand the structure and functioning of its parties.<sup>102</sup>

This dissertation extends the theoretical framework described to the sphere of bereavement, an experience assumed to be intimate, authentic, and individual, located far from the public space. I will show that the policy of bereavement, as expressed in commemoration, is likewise a captive of Israel's politicians, and that this policy serves

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<sup>98</sup> Doron, G., 1979b, *The Smoking Paradox*, Cambridge, MA: ABT.

<sup>99</sup> Shapiro, Y. 1996, *A Society Held Captive by Its Politicians*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim. (Hebrew)

<sup>100</sup> Pizzomo, A., 1987, Politics Unbound, in C. S. Maier (ed.), *The Changing Boundaries of the Political*, London: Cambridge University Press, pp. 27-63.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Shapiro, Y., 1989.

and sustains the interests of its most significant actors, the political parties. Among these interests we find those having broad collective significance, designed to produce a society based on broad, shared ideational and symbolic foundations as well as a common identity. Alternatively, we will also find narrow interests, embodied in a symbolic consensus that was scrupulously formed to impose a hegemonic worldview and to further the particularistic interests of the dominant party.

The political history of commemoration in Israel, as described and analyzed in the following pages, can therefore add to our understanding of how parties maintain their dominance in new, democratic societies.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Political Sphere**

Review of the parliamentary legislation leaves little room for interpretation or broad discussion about its meanings and implications. A parliament is one of the few sites in which we can observe power openly and grasp its immediate intent. Legislation is the stage at which public policy is formulated into compulsory mandates addressed to the administrative arena and regulatory agencies, to those who implement decisions. As such, legislation is the process through which major coordinates of the socio-political structure of the budding nation are melded. Contrary to the intellectual exercises required to unravel the motivations underlying many of the events to be analyzed in the following chapters, legislation is immediately open to diagnosis of the political interests that motivate the process.

After the new State of Israel was established, the political leadership faced a new challenge. This involved reproduction of the political and organizational patterns and processes developed in response to the power relations and control structure characterizing the period of the Yishuv, and endowment of those patterns and processes with a validity appropriate to the evolving democratic political culture. At first glance, issues touching upon the distribution of power and interest group access to the sites of policy formation were reopened to competition, now according to the rules of the democratic parliamentary game. These were the means by which Mapai, the hegemonic party during the period of Yishuv, hoped to reproduce its former status and to attain dominance over Israel's parliamentary process as well as its ideological



and political existence. The numerous legislative initiatives required to fulfill these objectives placed weighty subjective demands on the public with respect to the new reality, but especially regarding their perception of the War of Independence, the pivotal event in the life of the young nation. The laws not only reflected these conditions; significantly, helped to create them. Insights obtained from the direct as well as indirect reading of the laws were translated and internalized as social values, a process influencing subsequent political behavior. Ben Gurion's dual aspirations — construction of his self-professed image as the War's exclusive leader and establishing Mapai's status as the sole organization supporting him throughout the period — would find expression in massive legislation. The impact of that legislation, beyond its short-term effect on government structure and process, was the public's acceptance of Ben Gurion's claims that he and his movement were the lone institutions responsible for Israel's statehood.

The second challenge awaiting the new regime was the mission, again defined by Ben Gurion, of erasing all mention of the contributions to national independence made by what he called the "rebellious" underground organizations, Etzel and Lehi, from collective memory. This challenge was, in effect, the direct sequel of his policy during the Yishuv, when he would publicly label the underground as illegitimate. His policy was based on the fact that the very existence of these organizations threatened Mapai's exclusive authority throughout the civil arena and in everything related to the monopoly Mapai demanded over the means of violence. Establishment of the State did little to swerve Ben Gurion from this political agenda: the exclusion of Etzel and Lehi veterans (as members of the largest dissident underground organizations) from any access to positions in the state administration. After 1948, he was able to do so by appropriating the War, its course and its human costs to the benefit of Mapai's

sustained hegemony. His goal was accomplished by inculcating a message stating that the underground had contributed nothing to the miracle of national resurrection.

Such statements found their way into the laws that institutionalized public perceptions of the Israel's War of Independence. That is, these laws identified the community that bore the brunt of the War, who could be categorized among the war dead, where and when public memory sites could be established, and in what form; they also identified who would be excluded from enjoying the associated rights and privileges. The overt aspects of those laws — for instance, the eligibility criteria for the State compensation and economic assistance awarded to disabled veterans and the dead's survivors, state support for commemorative projects, tax benefits and legal protection of employee status in the workplace — were rather marginal in their absolute effect. All told, only a few hundred individuals and/or families were affected. However, it was the covert aspects of these laws — that is, the interests behind the legislation — that had the more far-reaching impact. Ben Gurion quickly grasped that legislation was an ideal mechanism to promote long-term political interests and maintain political dominance, to maintain the momentum of the statist project. He understood that the success of his statist project would not be affected by the status or image of any sitting Knesset members, budgetary allocations, or items on the public agenda, but rather by its continued implementation in legislation. Laws were key instruments for the sustained identification of the dominant party with the crucial event of nation-building — national independence — and for the exclusion of competing groups. Through this device, collective memory could be constructed by those having exclusive access to the sites of its formation. Legislation was, then, a highly effective instrument for the production of "historical truth."



In the following, I trace this process as it was expressed in a selected number of memory sites: the culture of commemorative volumes, the impact of history texts in the area of education, practices in the area of national symbols and ceremonies, and the fallen who had paid the highest price for the nation-building project's success. All these sites were supported by legislation.

### **Delineating the War's Time Frame**

Michael Young has argued that "Every year can be considered the inaugural year...The crucial step involves framing several events within a specific time and transforming that period into 'our' time — an opening date having special meaning must be linked [to the events] for this purpose."<sup>1</sup> It appears that Young's argument was rigorously implemented in Knesset decisions regarding the dates of the War of Independence. Although, historically, the date marking the outbreak of the War is still under contention, the political arena was called to mark the temporal boundaries of the War in order to recognize its dead and wounded as war dead or disabled veterans deserving of state support. The War's dates therefore define a preferential community supportive of the hegemonic elite. Ben Gurion, desirous of implementing his political goals through public administrative means, decided that such temporal bounds would assist him in denying the underground access to that same status and those same rewards. Hence, it was decided that the War's duration would cover the period between 29 November 1947 and 30 May 1948. These dates enabled recognition of those who did battle as soldiers enlisted in the IDF. In the laws stipulating the criteria for eligibility as state-recognized dead, a clause was added that endowed the Prime Minister the discretion necessary to include Hagana yet ignore Etzel and Lehi dead

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<sup>1</sup>Young, M., 1988, *The Metronomic Society — Natural Rhythms and Human Timetables*. London: Thames and Hudson.



who had fell not only during the years preceding the War but also during its course.

Specifically, the clause states:

Military service and service — interpretation: During the period between 30 November 1947 until 30 May 1948 — every service that the Minister of Defense declares to be so, as published in the *Reshumot* [the government law bulletin], is military service for this purpose.

It was Nathan Yellin-Mor (MK, HaLochamim) who demanded that the Knesset expand the scope of the dates so that the State could recognize those who had fallen earlier. His proposal declared that the State would also express its economic and symbolic obligation to the families who had lost their children "from the date of publication of the *White Paper* [the British government's policy paper limiting immigration to Israel], 17 May 1939, until 14 May 1948, including all operations planned against the British Mandate in the Land of Israel." He justified his proposal by declaring that:

by means of this proposal I place before the Knesset the rights of dozens of individuals, fighters who had died in battle in the pre-State period...The State at whose head stands Mr. David Ben-Gurion cannot escape its obligations to the families of these fighters who volunteered and died during the War...Is it at all imaginable that such feelings of vengeance and resentment should be felt toward brothers? [I believe that such a] responsibility should rest upon the shoulders of every citizen, every patriot.<sup>2</sup>

The Minister of Defense thought differently. "By the authority vested in me," Ben Gurion stated on 2 August 1950:

according to Article 1 of the *Law: Families of Soldiers Who Died in the War (Compensation and Rehabilitation)*, 1950, I declare that a tour of duty in the Hagana and tours of duty in all planned operations against the Arab bands and

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<sup>2</sup>Yellin-Mor, N. 5 July 1950, Session No. 172 of the First Knesset, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

invading armies during the period 30 November 1947 until 31 December 1948 — is to be considered military duty for the purposes of the stated law."

On 16 August of that same year, his notification was entered as a binding clause in the *Yalkut HaPirsumim*,<sup>3</sup> in these words: "... a tour of duty in the Hagana and tours of duty served in all planned operations against the Arab bands and invading armies as military service."<sup>4</sup>

These politically motivated statements accompanied decisions implemented by administrative bodies. The Head of the History Branch, the Ministry of Defense, wrote that the War of National Sovereignty was defined as continuing during the period of warfare extending from 29 November 1947 (the date of the UN declaration on the partition of Palestine) until 20 June 1949 (the date of the signing of the cease fire agreement with Syria, the last of the cease fire agreements signed).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, every phase of the care given to the families of the fallen and of disabled soldiers was under the control of the Commemoration Unit and its official policy. The Unit set strict parameters regarding the definition of IDF fallen, hence, the criteria for recognition and support, too. From the point of view of the Unit, the War's dead, like its wounded casualties were all those who had fallen between the cited dates, as Ben Gurion (in his role as Minister of Defense) had made clear to Shaul Avigur during one of their meetings on the subject.<sup>6</sup> Avigur was a perfect audience for such a comment: Avigur was head of the Hagana's intelligence unit (known as *Shai*), organized the persecution of Etzel (the period known as the *Season*), served as Ben Gurion's

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<sup>3</sup>Government notices of all varieties are published in the *Yalkut HaPirsumim*.

<sup>4</sup>Notification according to *Families of Soldiers Who Died in the War (Compensation and Rehabilitation)*, 1950, 16 August 1950. *Reshumot*, No. 104, p. 1363. (Hebrew)

<sup>5</sup>Lorech, Lt. Col. N., Head, the History Branch, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, 20 March 1953. IDF Archives, 580\55 - 14. (Hebrew)

<sup>6</sup>Avigur, S. 11 October 1949, letter to Dekel, Y., the Commemoration Unit, the IDF Archives, \56 - 59 580. (Hebrew)



personal advisor after the establishment of the State and was actively though informally involved in determining policy for the Commemoration Unit.<sup>7</sup>

On the face of it, the stipulated date should have been an impediment for Hagana veterans given that they, like Etzel and Lehi veterans, had fought prior to 29 November. In effect, as will be made clear, veterans of the three organizations were not treated as equal by the bureaucracy. Procedures were devised or later "discovered" in order to nullify the temporal constraints that might deny Hagana veterans access to state recognition and the basket of veterans' rights although this same policy was not applied to members of the other two groups. Mordechai Olmert (MK, Herut) addressed these inconsistencies in response to Yaakov Govrin's (Hagana veteran and MK, Mapam) argument that the Hagana, like Etzel and Lehi, were in the same category concerning their rights as soldiers:

[I wish to comment] about the rights of the families of Hagana soldiers who were wounded before 30 November 1947. He [Govrin] has stated that no discrimination exists between Hagana and Etzel members in this area because Hagana members are also denied [physical] rehabilitation. Perhaps this is true legally although the practical reality is quite the opposite. Hagana members are rehabilitated and cared for by what were then called 'national' institutions...whereas the families of Etzel and Lehi members who were wounded prior to that date receive no assistance whatsoever. Discrimination does in fact exist.<sup>8</sup>

### **Who was the Enemy?**

The second message that Mapai was eager to transmit concerned the identification of the War of Independence as a struggle solely against the Arabs. Recall of the fight against the British would have demanded recognition of Etzel and Lehi, organizations

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<sup>7</sup>For a recent biography of Avigur see Boaz, A., 2001, *Unseen Yet Always Present*, Tel Aviv: Maarachot, Ministry of Defense. (Hebrew)

<sup>8</sup>Olmert, M., 12 May 1952, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



formed for the purpose of driving the British out of Palestine. Contrary to the battle against the Arab forces, the campaign against the British found no expression in any area of legislation. On paper, then, the only armed conflict conducted on the road to independence was that waged against the Arabs. This policy of evasion was manifested in the law defining "military service" as it appeared in the *Reshumot* in February 1951: "Service in the Hagana or in any other planned operation against the Arab bands or invading [Arab] armies as of 30 November 1947 until 31 December 1948."<sup>9</sup>

The pattern was repeated with respect to the *Law: Compensation and Rehabilitation Law (1950)*. A commotion erupted in the Knesset when the opposition learnt that the law did not recognize Etzel and Lehi veterans as soldiers. Although the Hagana's disabled veterans also gained no benefits directly from the original law, they were eventually covered by it, based on a cited clause delegating to the Minister of Defense the authority to extend eligibility. In the wake of the parliamentary pressure exerted by Herut, a correction to the law was published in *Yalkut HaPirsumim* (another law bulletin). This meant that eligibility for compensation would be extended to families of the dead "who had participated in operations against the Arab bands and invading armies." Removal of the respective dates allowed agencies to assist some Etzel and Lehi disabled veterans under the condition that they were wounded during operations against the Arabs alone, that is, the State continued to disavow the victims of the campaign against the British forces.

"Can you imagine what would we look like today," asserted Chaim Landau (MK, Herut) toward the Mapai benches "had it not been for that struggle, for which no one seeks any reward...You would be drinking tea with MacMichael [the British

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<sup>9</sup>*Reshumot*, 8 February 1951.

High Commissioner for Palestine] somewhere in Jerusalem — without it, you would be subject to the British High Commissioner's decisions and you would be imploring him for 300 certificates [immigration permits]...." But Landau's words were of no avail: Mapai continued to refuse to recognize the contest against the British. Hence, the families of those who died or were wounded during this struggle but did not belong to the Hagana were deprived of all forms of state assistance. "We have not yet been able to convince this house [i.e., the Knesset] to set aside the party bickering that guides the government and the majority of [Knesset] members in their actions regarding that same segment of the Yishuv that took upon itself the entire burden of the War of Independence....," lamented Yehoshua Lankin (MK, Herut). "To date, they [i.e., Mapai] are still attempting to dispossess these Jewish youths, to deny them their rights, to transform them into non-citizens and lacking in any economic and moral foundations."<sup>10</sup>

On 1 April 1951, the budget for the fiscal year 1952-1953 was passed. During the debate over the bill, Esther Raziel-Naor (MK, Herut) proposed to enlarge the amount allocated for compensation and rehabilitation of veterans and their families. Her objective was to benefit the entire community of veterans who had survived the War. "Under this item we propose allocating the sum of IL£150,000 to [care for] the disabled from the war to free Israel from British rule during the years 1939-1948." She also noted that "the War of Independence...did not begin on 14 May 1948." From her perspective, it "began, in effect, with Etzel's war against the British, which began in 1939." The position she advocated stated that "this is the war that eventually captivated the nation's youth, the entire country, and [inspired] them to...struggle for freedom...and to oust the British...." At this sitting she also raised the issue of the

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<sup>10</sup>Lankin, Y., 8 September 1949, debate regarding the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (1949)*, Session 79, the First Knesset, *Knesset Protocols*.

needs of veterans and casualties' families who had not been granted any state support. The State, she claimed, "denies the rights of those who participated in operations against the British."

Her words were translated into Ministry of Defense policy. Lt. Colonel Amnon Zair was assigned the task of classifying the Etzel fallen whose names Shelach (של"ח, the acronym for *Freedom Fighters' Service Association*) forwarded to the Ministry. The first list was sent by Shelach's Center for Fighters and Soldiers on 6 December 1948. Lt. Colonel Kis, working with Zair, listed the names according to the battles in which they participated. Soldiers who had fallen in Etzel actions against the British were categorized as "unconditionally ineligible" (emphasis in the original). Nevertheless, Kis reports, other names were accepted. Among those were "the fallen from the Rosh Ha'ayin, Yehudia, Wilhelma, Tulkarem, Ayn Razel operations" against the Arabs.<sup>11</sup> The dead were deferred if they had been involved in actions against the British, even those undertaken within the framework of the short-lived common underground movement (*Tnuat HaMeri*, late 1945 to June 1946), with the blessings of Yishuv institutions and in cooperation with the Hagana:

Approved were almost all the Jerusalem dead...all the dead and missing-in-action from Rosh Ha'ayin...Unapproved were the dead from the underground movement, approved were the Mishmar Hayarden dead, 41 out of 51 dead and missing-in-action from Ramle, all the dead from the defense of Tel Aviv and the capture of Jaffa...all the dead from Yehudia....<sup>12</sup>

It was with reference to these events that some years later, Uri Avneri would write the following in *HaOlam HaZeh*:

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<sup>11</sup>Zair, A., 23 February 1949, letter to the Chief of the General Staff, Y. Dori, IDF Archives, \49 - 212 7335. (Hebrew)

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



No state law exists that guarantees compensation to members of the underground who had fallen in the war against the British Mandate. The government has abstained from legislating such a law lest it indicate that Etzel and Lehi actions had benefited the Jewish people in some form...It is difficult to fathom the obscure party interests that motivate Israeli legislation...A wide political gap separated the Hagana from Etzel and Lehi. To this very day, they continue to argue over their various routes. However, one detail cannot be argued: Members from both sides died in the belief that they were serving their people, not one party or another, and no fleeting government coalition.<sup>13</sup>

### **Authority**

Spread throughout the legislative coordinates was the message that the only partners to the war effort, as soldiers and as casualties, were those who had fought under the orders and with the approval of the political (the so-called "national") institutions that managed the Yishuv. After the boundaries of the community of dead had been set by means of state rituals enacted on politically meaningful dates, another restriction was set. It involved determination of whether the military activities in which the dead had participated entailed any subversion of (or contempt for) the authority of the Yishuv's leadership, headed by Mapai, and the authority of the Hagana as the sole official armed force. It was Yosef Dekel who requested that Israel's President or Prime Minister declare that all those who fell in the war against the enemy "in any operation that did not accord with the policies of the authorized institutions as of 1 December 1947, would not be considered servicemen."<sup>14</sup> Despite Ben Gurion's position that there was no sense in formally setting down such a limitation, the Ministry of Defense informed Herut that "the rights of the individuals who served in the unofficial

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<sup>13</sup>Avneri, U. 19 June 1952, *HaOlam HaZeh*. (Hebrew)

<sup>14</sup>Ben Gurion, D., 29 May 1949, letter to Avigur, S. Private correspondence. (Hebrew)

organizations would not be recognized."<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, the rights of Hagana veterans were acknowledged even if their service ended prior to independence.

The political debates over these issues were surprisingly similar to the disputes waged during the period of the Yishuv. "All those who did not comply with state discipline [i.e., orders] did not serve the nation" declared Reuven Sari (MK, Mapai) during Knesset deliberations on the law. Rather, Sari continues:

Whoever complied with the Jewish Agency's orders in the pre-State period must be covered by the law beginning with the early days of the State, together with the Hagana. The law delegates this authority to the Minister of Defense...The [proposed] law legislatively supports the State's prerogatives and obligations. A state that bows to anyone who denies his obligations, or even to rebels, and then awards him a prize, undermines its authority among the citizenry and thereby threatens its own foundations. Israel will not consent to being such a nation.

Thus, for instance, in the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (1954)*, the first clause, "Disabled veterans from the period of the Yishuv," stipulates that among all those wounded prior to 30 November 1947, only those who had served "according to the appeal made by Israel's national institutions" would be eligible for the services covered.

The right viewed the position manifested in the law as a continuation of the pre-State conflict. Then, as well, neither strategic nor operational issues had led the Hagana to object to the underground's actions; rather, it was the challenge to Mapai's authority that instigated their wrath. Herut viewed this policy as a "system based on disregard of the suffering experienced by the families of Etzel fallen and wounded who had shed their blood in operations denied official 'approval' by the 'organized'

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<sup>15</sup>Cited in *Igeret LeAch*, 4 Nissan 1949. (Hebrew)

institutions."<sup>16</sup> The attitudes that greeted demands to include individuals wounded in operations that had not been authorized by the Hagana among the lists of eligible soldiers were similar to those held during the Yishuv. "Why such arrogance, why this self-satisfaction over their unwillingness to recognize the authority of the national institutions?" railed Golda Meir (MK, Mapai) in response. She went on to explain that her objections were political in character, and aimed against the right as alternatives to the institutions in power: "In its [Herut's] own way, it attempted to subvert anything official...The World Zionist Organization exists — it must be destroyed; independent national institutions exist — they must be assailed and their authority undermined...The Yeshuv is faced with a bloody war against a foreign power — its forces must be divided."

In contrast to this position, Meir would delineate, on another occasion, what she believed the State should do for the benefit of Hagana veterans: During the first roll call vote on Amendment No. 3 of *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (1954)*, brought before the Knesset on 30 December 1952, Meir, from her position as Minister of Labor, argued that "when first discussing the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment* in 1949...we were not in a position to expand the law nor to grant its benefits to other disabled veterans, even those whose rights we had always recognized." She immediately specified which veterans she was referring to: "...the disabled veterans who served in the British Army and the Hagana's armed unit. The proposed law is meant to amplify the 1949 law, it expands the law's scope and incorporates those who enlisted in response to the appeals made by the national institutions and inducted into active units of the British Army as well as those who served in active units of the Hagana. According to the proposed law,

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<sup>16</sup>*Herut*, 24 February 1954. (Hebrew)



these veterans will be guaranteed full eligibility for the same compensation and rehabilitation benefits as those granted to IDF veterans."

On 1 October 1949, under the heading: "Treatment of Families of Etzel Martyrs," the Rehabilitation Branch wrote the following to Moshe Tzadok, Head of the IDF's Personnel Division:

At the time, it was decided to take care of families and soldiers in the event that the said soldiers had participated in an operation that had been coordinated with the Hagana or the IDF. Please inform me if it is possible, in principle, to deal with the above. If your answer is in the positive, I also request that the list be transmitted to the General Staff in order to notify us if the operations in which the said Etzel soldiers were involved were coordinated with the Hagana or with the IDF.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding this same list, Tzadok requested on 30 October that the Operations Division of the General Staff "mark next to each name whether the individual had fallen during an Etzel operation that was coordinated with a Hagana or in an IDF operation."<sup>18</sup> Previously, on 28 October 1948, in a secret letter sent to the head of the Personnel Division of the IDF, Tzadok had written that every case of injury resulting from an operation coordinated with the IDF was to be dealt with.<sup>19</sup> The list received in response indicated the following, by operation: Jaffa — "no!!"; Ramle — "coordinated"; Jerusalem — "not in practice"; Yehudia, Wilhema and Rosh HaAyin — "yes."

In the course of its correspondence with the Ministry of Defense, during which Shelach had tried to promote inclusion of the underground's bereaved families among those eligible for treatment by the Ministry, it transmitted the names of unrecognized

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<sup>17</sup>Unsigned. 30 October 1948, letter to Tzadok, M., IDF Archives, 7335\49 - 212. (Hebrew)

<sup>18</sup>Tzadok, M. 28 October 1948, to Herut, IDF Archives, 7335\49 - 212. (Hebrew)

<sup>19</sup>Tzadok, M. 28 October 1948, letter to head of the Personnel Division, IDF, 7335\49 - 212. (Hebrew)

military dead with the demand that they be added to the list of the recognized. The response, received in a letter from the Rehabilitation Branch of the Ministry of Defense, stated that: "Care ...will be extended only to Etzel casualties and their families and to the families of Etzel dead who participated in authorized operations." The Division requested that Shelach transmit to it a "list of casualties and the authorized operations during which they received their wounds" while explicitly stating that "the lists will be examined by Hagana veterans familiar with the events. The legislation regarding soldiers' rights, currently being finalized, will be in effect exclusively for IDF servicemen who enlisted according to the mobilization orders issued by the authorized national institutions in early December 1947. The rights of individuals serving in unauthorized organizations will not be recognized."<sup>20</sup> This position was manifested in Ministry of Defense decision making. During a meeting held on 22 September with Moshe Tzadok, Shelach's representatives transmitted a list of the dead still awaiting approval. The Ministry official, for his part, transmitted the documents to the IDF and requested that they "determine whether the said operations were implemented in cooperation with the IDF...."<sup>21</sup>

### **Legitimation**

The translation of legitimation into legislative parameters was necessary to grant a normative imprimatur to the behavior of a political leadership that had persecuted "subversive" organizations, initiated acts of political and physical violence against them, and delegitimated their operations and goals. Any recognition of the legitimacy of Herut's participation in the political discourse and practice threatened the total

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<sup>20</sup>Welfare and Rehabilitation Branch, date, letter to Shelach, quoted in *Herut*, 24 February 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>21</sup>The Local Committee for Soldiers and Their Families, 23 September 1948, letter to the Head, Personnel Division, Subject: Treatment of Etzel Martyrs' Families, IDF Archives, 7335\49 - 212. (Hebrew)

fabric of negation woven in the pre-State period and exposed that policy as rooted in political interests devoid of the moral attributes claimed by Mapai.

The first time that the issues of the rights and status of Etzel and Lehi disabled veterans and casualties appeared on the public agenda was during the eighteenth session of the First Knesset. The subject at hand was *Law: Demobilization (Return to Place of Work) 1949*, which ensured that demobilized soldiers were to be rehired by their former employers in the jobs they held prior to their mobilization. During the debate, Ben Gurion turned to Yaakov Meridor (MK, Herut), who had suggested that the law also apply to soldiers belonging to Etzel and Lehi before the War." As Meridor refused to maintain the partition between the two organizations (Etzel and Lehi considered as one), Ben Gurion corrected him: "And I thoroughly object to [your proposal], and I hope that the Knesset reject all those amendments." According to Ben Gurion, Meridor's proposal meant granting "equality to everyone. Equality is an exquisite word, just as "liberty" [*herut* in Hebrew] is an exquisite word. The question is: What content do we associate with these beautiful words? Equal rights and obligations for everyone — Yes! Equal treatment for all acts, good and evil alike — No! In the course of public affairs, in law and morality, there are acts to which we allot prizes and acts to which we allot punishment. We are not prepared to respond impartially to all the acts previously committed in this land. We distinguish quite carefully between acts. There are acts that we vetoed in the past and continue to do so in the present, just as there are acts that we approved in the past and continue to approve in the present. It appears odd to be asked, as the petitioner requests, that we react to evil acts in the same way that we react to beneficent acts."

Ben Gurion's fierce objection to providing support to the survivors of the underground's dead was based on his grasp of the political and symbolic significance



of such a move, shared with his Mapai colleagues. Eliyahu Golomb (MK, Mapai) would say as much: the underground's inclusion under the law would signify "public approval of their methods of action" in the past; "they are not acceptable...coordinated, integrated and authorized operations, cases such as these — will be acknowledged. And the Central Committee states that the remainder will be left to the discretion of the Minister of Defense." Pinchas Lubiniker (MK, Mapai), the Chairman of the Knesset Labor Committee, also argued that the inclusion of Etzel and Lehi veterans among the eligible would retroactively sanction the underground's activities.<sup>22</sup> In his war diaries, Ben Gurion wrote that when "Herut voiced their demands, I told myself not to discuss the matter with Etzel — we should simply forget their crimes, that they should dare to request any reward for their machinations."<sup>23</sup>

### **Etzel and Lehi: Mention in Legislation**

The motivation to exclude Etzel and Lehi from the official collective memory was likewise expressed in the determined effort to avoid any specific reference, by name, to their organizations. This included the area of legislation. With reference to the clause regarding "cases liable for consideration with respect to this law as military service prior to establishment of the State," considered during the debate over amendment of the penal code, Yaakov Rifkin (MK, Mapai) argued that "there is no basis for such anonymity. The organization that preceded the Israel Defense Forces had a clearly assigned and recognized name, 'the Hagana.'" Rifkin suggested that instead of using the standard wording found in Israeli legislation until then — "service declared as military service for the purposes of this clause" — a revised version

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<sup>22</sup>*Maariv*, 12 April 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>23</sup>Ben Gurion, D. 1951, *Diaries*, Sde Boker, Ben Gurion Archives, entry dated 29 December 1948, p. 910. (Hebrew)

should be used that would clearly state its implicit meaning. The wording he suggested was "[service] in the regular forces of the Hagana in the State of Israel or in a unit active in the war against Nazism as well as any other service declared as military service for the purposes of this clause." He believed that the candid inclusion of the Hagana in state law would not alter the preferential status of the Hagana vis-à-vis the underground organizations, that is, its meaning would remain purely symbolic. By incorporating the phrase, the IDF would preserve "the grand historical continuity with the same forces that created it...this organization [the Hagana] has a place in history, and should not be remembered as some mysterious 'military service.' It has a name, and the Knesset is obligated to ensure the perpetuation of that name in accordance with the history of the Hagana and the establishment of the IDF."<sup>24</sup> Rifkin's position was adopted, and the name "Hagana" entered the legislation.

Herut gave Rifkin's request its full support. At the same time, it petitioned, as could be expected, that the name of Etzel like that of Lehi be noted as well. It was Eliezer Shostak (MK, Herut) who proposed:

...to clearly indicate the name [of the organization] and to say that a military tour of duty meant a tour of duty in a service declared as defense service in the regular forces of the Hagana in Israel, of the National Military Organization, of the Fighters for the Liberation of Israel, and of any other service that will be considered as military service for the purposes of this clause.<sup>25</sup>

The symbolic and political significance of spelling out the names of the underground organizations is confirmed by the fact that the Minister of Defense could exercise his discretion in awarding survivors the basket of government support

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<sup>24</sup>Rifkin, Y., 15 June 1954, Session No. 439, the Second Knesset, debate regarding *Amendment of the Penal Code (Crimes Against the State)*, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew) [

<sup>25</sup>Shostak, E., 15 June 1954, Session No. 439, the Second Knesset, debate regarding *Amendment of the Penal Code (Crimes Against the State)*, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



without specifically mentioning their organizational allegiance. It was the mention of only one of the three pre-State organizations — the Hagana — with the explicit exclusion of the other two that enflamed the argument. "We demand a clear statement in the law: [Military] service in Israel within units of the Israel Defense Forces...Etzel and...Lehi — these boys have names," proclaimed Esther Raziell-Naor (MK, Herut). Her position was supported by several Knesset members from the left. "I myself would suggest indicating the full names of the other two organizations" noted Avraham Stopf (MK, General Zionists). Yet, Ben Gurion was resolute in his insistence that words construct historical consciousness, and that "the historical fact" was that "from November 1947 to June 1948, the IDF did not exist, and that the organization that fought [in Palestine] was the Hagana." Herzl Berger MK, Mapai) would use the same argument to counter Begin's remarks on this issue, with the addition that: "We do not wish the occasion of the ratification of the disabled veterans law to provide an opportunity to distort the history of the "alliance of thugs" [the appellation given a small right-wing group headed by Abba Ahimeir]."<sup>26</sup> Surprisingly, Hagana veterans voiced few objections to Raziell-Naor's demands, whereas Mapai strongly objected to this step as it interpreted the act in concrete political rather than historical terms. That is, this opposition reflected Ben Gurion's political rationality: his aim was to construct the past as an investment in the politics of the future.

Herut's entreaties were met, for the most part, with silence. A number of Etzel and Lehi disabled veterans did gain Ben Gurion's permission to be counted among those eligible for compensation (based, *inter alia*, on their participation in the few coordinated actions against the Arabs), thanks to a very broad interpretation of the respective clauses. Direct mention of the organizations' names in the legislation was

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<sup>26</sup>Berger, H. 6 April 1954. Session No. 411, debate regarding, the Second Knesset, Subject: *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) 1954*, Second and Third Reading. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



nevertheless avoided throughout. As Eliezer Shostak (MK, Herut) noted: "The Minister of Defense has decided in the cases of these disabled veterans...and they will be included among those eligible for compensation...but it refuses to explicitly mention their names."<sup>27</sup>

Herut was very well aware of the political significance of the inclusion of the underground organizations' names in legislation, a significance that, as stated, went well beyond the material government support to be distributed. In the debate on legislation ordering the benefits to be awarded upon demobilization, after being informed of the government's intentions to discard his proposal to add the refinement "a fighter who died while serving in one of the armed organizations, that is, the Hagana, Etzel and Lehi" within the law's text, Arie Ben Eliezer (MK, Herut) charged that Mapai's "majority vote represents another retreat, similar to your retreat from the War of Independence when you withdrew from the fighting [against the British]."<sup>28</sup> The attempt to penetrate the normative consensus was a challenge whose lack of realization was considered a failure by the right even if partial gains with respect to eligibility for compensation were achieved. After ratification of the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) 1954*, which expanded eligibility, Ben-Zion Katznellenbogen (Shelach) wrote the following to Esther Raziell-Naor: "We have not modified our position with respect to the substance of the law and to those of its stipulations that ignore the role of the armed underground while specifically mentioning the name of the Hagana. It remains silent about Etzel and

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<sup>27</sup> Shostak, E., 17 June 1957, debate regarding *Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) (1954)*, (*Miscellaneous Orders*), First Reading, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>28</sup> Ben-Eliezer, E., 25 April 1949, debate regarding *Law: Demobilized Soldiers* (draft for reconsideration), *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

Lehi."<sup>29</sup> And so, none of the laws passed by Israel's Knesset expressly mention either Etzel or Lehi, excluding the law that declares Lehi a terrorist organization.<sup>30</sup>

### **Attitudes toward Hagana Dead**

Compared to other underground veterans, Hagana veterans forged themselves into a group displaying acute political consciousness together with easy access to official policy-making arenas. The families of the Hagana fallen were aware that they, too, would pay the price of ineligibility for material support if their peers from Etzel and Lehi were excluded: To repeat, the dead of all three organizations were killed in similar periods and sometimes during operations whose purposes were identical. However, the Hagana's representatives in the Knesset operated to bias legislation to their favor in direct proportion to the degree that they supported elimination of the underground from Israel's collective memory.

The main goal set before this group was the prevention of any mention of Etzel or Lehi in the legislation institutionalizing the status of casualties and disabled veterans as well as the benefits to be awarded to their survivors and dependents. "I have sympathy for those who replaced the war of liberation [*herut* in Hebrew] with the war for Herut [the Party's name]" remarked Israel Bar-Yehuda (MK, Mapam). "Although others than those who fought with the Hagana have suffered...our subject here is the War of Independence" he continued, while differentiating those who fought with the Hagana from Etzel and Lehi fighters. In response, Esther Razieli-Naor shouted: "And those [the right] didn't fight?"<sup>31</sup>

Mapai's Labor Movement partner, Mapam, like Herut and HaLochamim, the last comprised primarily of former Lehi members, objected to the temporal limitations

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<sup>29</sup>Katznelson, B., 1 June 1955, letter to Razieli-Naor, E. (Hebrew) [source]

<sup>30</sup>Law passed after assassination of Count Bernadotte, complete (Hebrew)

<sup>31</sup>... complete (Hebrew)

that excluded the pre-29 November 1948 dead and wounded. Yet, the group targeted by Mapam was not that associated with the underground, a point they scrupulously stressed. For instance, when Herzl Berger (MK, Mapam), Chairman of the Knesset Labor Subcommittee warned that the related legislation deprived "disabled veterans from the British Army's Jewish battalions [the 38<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> King's Fusiliers] who fought in World War I,"<sup>32</sup> Yaakov Rifkin, of Mapai, who supported the inclusion of these soldiers within the framework of the law, remarked that "the proposal had no relationship to the personal fate of members of the underground."<sup>33</sup>

The proposal that Rifkin personally promoted, which was eventually accepted by the Committee, was to empower the Minister of Defense to personally decide upon the eligibility of disabled veterans who did not fulfill the formal criteria stipulated by the law. Furthermore, he stressed, the purpose of the respective clause was to permit support for Hagana veterans and by no means was it meant to "equate the [underground]...with those who had fought in the War of Independence." Contrary to the support requested for Hagana veterans, which Rifkin dubbed as "humanitarian," any possibility of extending eligibility to the right was described by him as the "political dividends and historical rehabilitation of Etzel and Lehi...an endeavor meant to determine a new view of the history of our defense and the struggle for independence by introducing symmetry between the Hagana and what are called the 'other defensive organizations.'" In conclusion, he voiced his hopes that "the Knesset will repudiate this outrageous attempt...The point is that only the Hagana was

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<sup>32</sup>Berger, H., 6 April 1954, debate regarding the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) 1954*, Second and Third Reading, Session No. 411, the Second Knesset. *Knesset Protocols*. Complete (Hebrew)

<sup>33</sup>Rifkin, Y., 6 April 1954, debate regarding the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) 1954*, Second and Third Reading, Session No. 411, the Second Knesset. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



authorized to act by democratic institutions maintained by the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement.<sup>34</sup>

Arguments couched in similar terms were raised with respect to all the laws that touched upon the rights of survivors and disabled veterans. During the debate on the *Law: Military Service (1949)* prior to its passage, Berel Reptor (MK, Mapam), in the name of his movement, proposed a revision that would replace the expression "every type of service that the Minister of Defense will proclaim" with a more explicit statement: "every type of service in a unit of the Hagana will be recognized as military service for the purposes of this sub-paragraph." In elaborating his point he stated that:

...our purpose in [proposing] this revision is to protect the rights of former Hagana members who freely volunteered and sacrificed themselves to the cause of Israel's defense, according to the appeal issued by the Jewish Agency and the National Committee as the leading national institutions. We believe that all the operations undertaken by Hagana members throughout the years should be considered...The Hagana filled the role of a regular army long before...declaration of the State...Why should we deprive those who served for years in the Hagana and in the Jewish Brigade. After all, the members of the Hagana were recruited by the Zionist institutions that represented the highest authorities in our impending state.<sup>35</sup>

Such arguments convinced the government. As Pinchas Rosen, the Minister of Justice would explain: "If it is meant the period preceding November 1947...it is impossible to enter the revision in the proposed law...Nor is 'the Hagana' noted within the law before us"; however, he did agree that "to the extent that this issue touches upon widows and orphans, the government is open to taking on the responsibility of

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Reptor, B., 8 September 1949, Session No. 49, the First Knesset, regarding *Law: Military Service (1949)*. *Knesset Protocols*, complete (Hebrew)

caring for them, irrespective of the period involved...The government is also ready...to care for the survivors of other Hagana dead even if they are not covered by the law."<sup>36</sup>

Mapam enlisted in the campaign to guarantee protection of the rights of the Hagana's disabled veterans and the dead's survivors within the evolving legislation. Thus, Hannah Lamdan (MK, Mapam) demanded inclusion of the following sentence: "Military service...is also to refer to service in the Hagana." She also suggested that eligibility for compensation and rehabilitation be extended to the families of soldiers who had served in the Jewish Brigade, the ghetto uprisings in Europe, the partisans, and those foreign armies that had fought against Hitler during World War II, that is, any form of armed engagement prior to 30 November 1948; membership in the armed underground was explicitly excluded. Additionally, in a letter (26 September 1949) written to the Minister of Defense by the interim national leadership of the Hagana Veterans Association, Ben Gurion was asked to publicize a statement indicating that "service in the Hagana, beginning on 30 November 1947, would be considered as military service [in the IDF]." Such a statement was indeed published.

In this case, the interests of Hagana veterans meshed with Ben Gurion's political interests regarding the underground, its exclusion from seats of power and elimination from collective memory. The absence of any mention of Etzel and Lehi from the compensation legislation was a clearcut expression of how those interests were realized. "It was with great satisfaction that we read your announcement in the press regarding the disabled veterans law, where you agreed to provide Hagana veterans...with a status comparable to IDF disabled veterans," wrote the Hagana Veterans Association. At the same time, it continued to press for incorporation of this

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<sup>36</sup>Rosen, P., 6 April 1954, debate regarding the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) 1954*, Second and Third Reading, Session No. 411, the Second Knesset. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



equivalence within other laws. According to this view, the Knesset had yet to adequately correct the "unjust discrimination" that still existed in the law.<sup>37</sup>

Their efforts bore fruit. The clause delegating to the Minister of Defense the discretion to make case-by-case judgements regarding eligibility met with their satisfaction. "The Minister of Defense will determine these frameworks — who is considered to have been a participant in the planned operations and who is not," wrote David Bar Rabi-Hai (MK, Mapai). He continued thusly: "The Minister of Defense is quite cognizant of where to draw the line and how to protect the dignity and rights of Hagana members."<sup>38</sup> Ben Gurion verily did so, in the *Yalkut HaPirsumim*: "Service in the Hagana and in all planned operations against the Arab bands and the invading armies will be considered military service."<sup>39</sup> This directive was implemented throughout the Ministry of Defense. In a letter to the Chief of the General Staff, Yosef Dekel, Director of the Commemoration Unit, wrote that: "In accordance with custom, every individual who fell in the course of his service in the Hagana will be treated as a soldier in the IDF."<sup>40</sup> This appears to have been adequate reason for Hannah Lamdan (MK, Mapam) to characterize the spate of legislation as "the maximum measure of justice."<sup>41</sup>

The result of the political discourse and the legislation passed in the Knesset was the clarification of Ben Gurion's position, supported as anticipated by Hagana veterans: Etzel and Lehi veterans could definitely not be counted among the community responsible for the independence project. The statist ethos, rooted in the

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<sup>37</sup>Lamdan, H., 6 April 1954, debate regarding the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) 1954*, Second and Third Reading, Session No. 411, the Second Knesset. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>38</sup> Bar Rabi-Hai, D., 6 April 1954, debate regarding the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (Amended) 1954*, Second and Third Reading, Session No. 411, the Second Knesset. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>39</sup>Government of Israel, 16 August 1950, *Yalkut HaPirsumim*, 104, p. 1363. (Hebrew)

<sup>40</sup>Dekel, Y. 12 October 1949, letter to Y. Dori, Chief of the General Staff, IDF Archives 580\56 - 377. (Hebrew)

<sup>41</sup>Lamdan, H., 12 May 1952, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



dedication to collectivist values, had formerly been expressed in the obligation to sacrifice oneself in the defense of the Third Temple, the new State of Israel; it unquestionably excluded the underground, which did not abide by this ethos.

### **The Underground's Efforts to Obtain Support**

Etzel and Lehi veterans, under the Herut umbrella, had little faith that a political and institutional structure capable of inaugurating the Season, the policy of Etzel harassment and persecution during the British Mandate, was likely to change its attitude. Nonetheless, they did hope for some correspondence in state support for the families of the disabled and killed. Despite their pessimism, they set about working toward this goal. Chaim Landau (MK, Herut) attempted to reawaken the compensation eligibility debate: "We are not discussing the writing of history — even if attempts to distort it occur daily. Where will the honorable Knesset members be, will their consciences remain unstirred by the fact that the Gruner, Kahani and Habib families have not been recognized as survivors of those killed in action?"<sup>42</sup> Veterans of the underground roused their audiences from every stage open to them. "We approached the IDF's Casualties Department," veterans of the Mishmar HaYarden battle (in which the Syrians were repelled with the participation of Etzel forces) wrote to the Chief of the General Staff:

...and were asked a curious question — 'What organization did the fallen belong to?' When we responded that they were members of Etzel...the response was...that the IDF could not be responsible for their families...These dear soldiers were abandoned twice, once before their deaths — we will tell

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<sup>42</sup> Landau, C., 12 May 1952, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

the story at a future date — and once after their deaths, after they had sacrificed themselves for the homeland's defense.<sup>43</sup>

Knesset members belonging to the Revisionist camp made ceaseless attempts to include the families of disabled veterans and Etzel and Lehi dead among the groups eligible for State compensation and support. Just as ceaselessly they were met with what Eliezer Shostak (MK, Herut) described as: "Open denial by the State and the current government of the families and victims of the War of Independence...." Shostak went so far as to number the potential recipients of that aid: "Two hundred and sixty Etzel soldiers fell in this war. Of these, 70 fell in the war against the British, and dozens from Lehi...their survivors need help."<sup>44</sup>

Several of the underground's bereaved families, although accustomed to disdain and opposition, remonstrated against the institutional obtuseness to their plight. "The Prime Minister and Minister of Defense must know that even if Etzel's activities were not to his liking, its members nevertheless bled just like those of the Hagana,"<sup>45</sup> wrote Yaakov Gelbgisser, father of the twins Shlomo and Menachem. Although both brothers had been killed during the War, only Menachem was officially recognized as a casualty because he had died subsequent to his transfer into the IDF following incorporation of Etzel. After Gelbgisser was recognized as a bereaved father, he renounced this status. "I herewith return the announcement of my son Menachem's death, may he rest in peace. Despite the pain involved, I am ready to resign the honor," as he wrote to Prime Minister David Ben Gurion. "Two trees have

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<sup>43</sup>Secretariat, the Wedgewood agricultural settlement, cited in a letter from the Information and Public Relations Department, 16 March 1949, to Lt. Kis, Personnel Division, the General Staff, IDF Archives, 7335\49 - 212. (Hebrew)

<sup>44</sup>Shostak, E., 13 August 1950, Debate on *Amendment to Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment* and *Amendment to Law: Families of Soldiers Killed in the War*, Knesset Protocols. (Hebrew)

<sup>45</sup>Gelbgisser, Y., 30 September 1949, letter to Gal. E., the Prime Minister's Secretary, private correspondence. (Hebrew)

been hewn from my home — they were equally dear to me and they equally sacrificed themselves for their country. If the nation and the army want to commemorate the name of one and forget the other because the burst of fire that killed one killed an Etzel and not a Hagana soldier — I protest."<sup>46</sup>

Failure to ensure eligibility of Etzel and Lehi members within the welfare legislation caused the underground to turn to explicating the political dimensions of its opposition:

For the first time, an authorized government institution openly admits that the State of Israel differentiates between the fallen according to their affiliation with pre-State organizations...The question here is fundamental and important: Are we to officially approve the attempts made to describe the War of Independence as the product of the Hagana's endeavors on one day and deny its involvement the next, yet declare that the IDF is the continuation solely of the Hagana and not a universal fighting force that does not discriminate among its members.<sup>47</sup>

Herut took advantage of every forum open to them to advertise their exploits, whether against the British or the Arabs, in a campaign to persuade the public of their right to a place in the state arena as well as in collective memory. "During that period [of the War], important attacks were made not only by the IDF, then the Hagana, but also by Etzel and Lehi forces," declared Yaakov Meridor (MK, Herut):

Jaffa was liberated, as was Yehudia and settlements in the Ephraim Hills, and Ramallah was attacked, all along the coastal plane. In Jerusalem, Ramat Rachel was protected by Etzel forces, the liberation of Malcha was undertaken by Etzel...Many operations imperative for the defense of the country were executed by those same forces whose rights the Minister of Defense is

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<sup>46</sup>Gelbisser, Y., 5 May 1949, letter to Ben Gurion, D. private correspondence. (Hebrew)

<sup>47</sup>Gelbisser, Y. 1949, cited in *Igeret LeAch*, private document. (Hebrew)



unwilling to acknowledge...In that period, soldiers fell side-by-side; yet, one is forgotten while the other is remembered.<sup>48</sup>

The restrictive legislation was translated into an historical agenda conferred upon future generations. In *IDF Casualties of the War of Independence*, a report prepared in March 1953 by the History Branch of the General Staff in cooperation with the Office of the Chief Adjutant and the Statistics Bureau of the Office of the Prime Minister, a clear definition of the concept "war dead" was presented, as were the definitive dates of the War of Independence. In the subchapter entitled "Definitions," it was written:

War dead are considered to be all individuals who were killed under all circumstances during the period in which they served as soldiers in the IDF or who died as a result of injuries suffered during active service in the IDF, even if they were not regular soldiers enlisted in the IDF at the time. The identifying trait among all the above is that each received a military serial number. However, to those persons who fell during active service as members of the 'Hagana' yet before establishment of the armed forces, a military serial number and rank were awarded posthumously.<sup>49</sup>

The right's claims for equality were implicitly addressed by Golda Meir (MK, Mapai) when she summarized the attitude guiding formulation of the respective legislation: "It would have been much more pleasant for me if I could say that everyone is equal. But that would be only an illusion."<sup>50</sup>

Law	Substance
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<sup>48</sup>Meridor, Y., 12 May 1952, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>49</sup>Lorech, Lt. N., 20 March 1953, *IDF Dead from the War of Independence*, IDF Archives. 55\540 - 14. (Hebrew)

<sup>50</sup>Meir, G., 30 December 1952, *Debate regarding Law: Disabled Veterans Prior to Establishment of the State (1952)*, First Reading. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<i>Discharged Soldiers (Reinstatement and Employment) (1949)</i>	Guaranteed re-employment of soldiers at the place of work where they were employed at the time of their conscription
<i>Defense Service Amendment</i>	Definition of military service for the purpose of current legislation
<i>Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment</i>	Guaranteed state provision of compensation and rehabilitation services
<i>Penal Code</i>	Definition of military service for the purpose of current penal legislation
<i>Servicemen's Defense Counsel</i>	Provision of defense counsel to demobilized soldiers in court cases regarding eviction from apartments resulting from arrears in rental payment
<i>Order: Local Government</i>	Exemption from property tax payment for soldiers and war casualties

### **Shelach**

The labyrinthine system of laws brought about a situation where the families of the underground's wounded and dead were left deprived of any and all state support, as they were in the pre-State period, rejected by the social services as well as denied government recognition. In effect, until early 1949, Herut was the only body that accepted exclusive responsibility to assist all the War's casualties and bereaved families coming directly from Etzel's ranks and indirectly from Lehi. The Public Council for the Care of the Soldier's Family — an administrative body established by the pre-State Provisional Council to undertake this task was composed of 15 representatives, including those representing political interests: three representatives from the Ministry of Defense, three from women's organizations, and nine members of the Provisional Council. Of the latter, two were affiliated with Mapai, one with

HaTzahar, one with Mapam, one with the General Zionists, one with HaPoel HaMizrachi [a Zionist religious party], one representing the Yemenite community and one the Sephardic community. The Council thus reflected the political constellation ruling the Provisional Council, meaning that politics had invaded the State's response to bereavement.

In April 1949, Menachem Begin, as Etzel's former commander, decided to establish a special fund, Shelach — *Shikum Lochamei Hofesh* (Rehabilitation of Fighters for Liberation) — in response to the need for care. In mid April, the fund's creation was formally announced.<sup>51</sup> The organization was essentially a revised version of an association, founded by Herut, that had been functioning since October 1948. Shelach set up the "Office for the Soldier and the Fighter," a public council having 15 members that took upon itself "to rehabilitate and to assist in the rehabilitation of the underground's fighters, to support the families of fallen heroes, particularly those who receive no government aid, to provide medical care and to help those wounded during the underground's operations, and their families, especially those who receive no government aid, and to extend a helping hand to the underground's heroes."<sup>52</sup> At the head of its Board of Directors stood Menachem Begin.<sup>53</sup> A series of committees were also established: the Commemoration Committee, the Organization Committee, the Fundraising Committee (Diaspora and Tourism), the Information Committee, the Finance Committee assigned to the Monuments Committee, and the Compensation and Rehabilitation Committee.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Shelach, 1950, *Summary Report, 15 April 1949 to 31 October 1950*, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\12 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>52</sup>Shelach, 1950, *Summary Report, 15 April 1949 to 31 October 1950*, p. 4, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\12 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>53</sup>President: Menachem Begin, Chairman of the Board: Raphael Kotlowitz, Director General: Ben-Zion Katznellenbogen; Members: Yehuda Bilu, Shabtai Vardi, Reuben Yellin, Dr. Yaakov Litmanovsky, Dr. Israel Lifshitz (US), Dov Milman, Yaakov Meridor, Betzael Amitzur, Yehiel Kadishai, and Moshe Stein.

<sup>54</sup>The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\2\1 - 167. (Hebrew) complete



Shelach's initiatives fired, as might be anticipated, the expectations of the veterans from both underground organizations. Its demands were formulated in such a way as to force the State to adopt criteria that its public could meet. The battles, the temporal framework and the operations instigated against the British were events in which both Etzel and Lehi participated. This meant that although Shelach was directly affiliated with Etzel and meant to act in its interests, it promoted Lehi's interests, too, when the two were equivalent.

*Mifleget HaLochamim*, the political party founded by Lehi veterans that was active in the First Knesset, furthered a rather small number of initiatives aimed at protecting the rights of its the dead and disabled. Apparently, these were marginal issues on its agenda. It did, however, actively support private groups of Lehi veterans in their attempts to commemorate their fallen and was in constant touch with the administration. However, the driving force behind the attempts to penetrate the underground into Israel's collective memory and commemoration project was Menachem Begin. This ambition, which he perceived as one of his primary political objectives, was not shared by the Knesset members of the sister party, HaLochamim, which managed to win very few seats and did not survive the next elections. Contrary to Herut, whose members were homogenous in their ideology and agenda, particularly the will to present itself as the unequivocal alternative to Mapai, HaLochamim represented an ideologically heterogeneous membership. Moreover, it was unable to devise a political objective sufficiently clear to rally support and penetrate the collective memory.

In addition, review of the correspondence between its Knesset members and agency officials on the subject of eligibility for compensation reveals that Lehi's appeals to the Minister of Defense for case-by-case recognition of eligibility, based on

the discretionary powers delegated to him, were frequently awarded with approval. We may venture that this success was based on Ben Gurion's continuing assessment that Lehi did not represent a political threat on a par with Herut. This conclusion is supported, *inter alia*, by the "Jerusalem Association of Former Lehi Members," a private initiative founded by Lehi veterans, which included the "Committee for the Rehabilitation of Jerusalem's Fighters for Liberation." This organization's purpose was to "tend, as much as possible, for every fighter for Jerusalem's liberation requiring care and to work for the commemoration of our fallen, may the Lord revenge them." Nevertheless, the association informed the pertinent state institutions that it would be "joined only by the most prominent figures who took part in the war to liberate Jerusalem and were left penniless, including disabled veterans and the surviving members of the casualties' families." It closed its missive by stating: "The Association is apolitical in character."<sup>55</sup>

It was Nathan Yellin-Mor (MK, HaLochamim) who took upon himself the brunt of the effort to attend to the needs of the dead's survivors. With the creation of HaLochamim, parents of Lehi dead turned to its secretariat in order to express their surprise at the absence of their children's names from the official list of the dead and demanded that their representatives correct the situation. As the Association would write to one widow:

Please be advised as to your predicament. Our people are not found on the list of military [IDF] casualties but on a separate listed devoted to Lehi. Therefore, you could not find your husband's name, may the Lord revenge him...Mr. Yellin-Mor is dealing with the question of your husband to the same degree

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<sup>55</sup>Jerusalem Association of Former Lehi Members, undated? letter sent to each member personally, Mifleget HaLochamim Archives, Beit Yair, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)



that he is dealing with the other dead and the matter will be corrected as soon as the Knesset votes its approval.<sup>56</sup>

The party did indeed request of the Prime Minister that the state extend its services to their members. Ben Gurion responded that the State would care for each soldier and survivor "mentioned in the lists to the degree possible according to Ministry of Welfare procedures involving similar cases...."<sup>57</sup> Yet, the attitudes toward the families of Lehi casualties were similar to those toward Etzel survivors.<sup>58</sup> For instance, the correspondence between the Director of the Social Services Division and HaLochamim regarding the non-transfer of funds to recipients in Tel Aviv: "You must accept the facts. To date, the Municipality of Tel Aviv has refused to deal with cases of individuals belonging to your party."<sup>59</sup>

Parallel to Shelach's activities, HaLochamim collected the names of their wounded and killed, which they transmitted to the Committee for the Investigation of Claims and Conscription, the Ministry of Defense in order to further their retroactive and/or posthumous conscription within the ranks of the IDF, an act that would guarantee their eligibility for support and commemoration.<sup>60</sup> However, beyond these particularistic requests for assistance, it appears that HaLochamim, contrary to Herut, displayed little motivation to launch a frontal campaign on this and the related issue of

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<sup>56</sup>Secretariat, Mifleget HaLochamim, 13 January 1950, Mifleget HaLochamim Archives, Beit Yair, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)

<sup>57</sup>Director, Social Services Department, Ministry of Defense, 19 June 1949, to the Welfare Bureau, Ministry of Welfare, Mifleget HaLochamim Archives, Beit Yair, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)

<sup>58</sup>There were, however, exceptions. For instance, Yellin-Mor reported to the Casualties Department of the Ministry of Defense, Rehabilitation Division, the substance of a conversation between himself and the Prime Minister regarding "the bereaved father of our comrade Naftali Lubinschik, who was arrested by the British in 1941, incarcerated under inhuman conditions, transferred to Nakar with other deportees, and died in Asmara on 1946." Ben Gurion responded to Yellin-Mor's request and agreed that "we should take care of him." See Yellin-Mor, N., 2 March 1950, letter to the Casualties Department, Mifleget HaLochamim Archives, Beit Yair, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)

<sup>59</sup>Director, the Social Services Department, 5 September 1949, letter to Mifleget HaLochamim, Mifleget HaLochamim Archives, Beit Yair, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)

<sup>60</sup>Maaze, Gen. S., Head, Personnel Division, *Elul* 1950, letter to Yellin-Mor, N., Mifleget HaLochamim Archives, Beit Yair, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)



Lehi's penetration into Israel's collective memory. It yielded the management of such a campaign to the parliamentary arena, and to Herut as its chief strategist and commander in the field. As Yitzchak Shamir was to note with respect to Israel's historiography: "[The gains were a] result of Herut's efforts, being that it was the larger movement and better represented [in the Knesset]; in any case, its activities in the name of Etzel dead were directed toward Lehi dead as well."<sup>61</sup>

Another possible explanation for the differences in level of commitment may have been the presence of Menachem Begin, former commander of the National Military Organization and current leader of the major opposition party on the Knesset floor, coupled with the absence of Lehi's commander, Yitzchak Shamir, from active politics. After independence, Shamir had joined the Mossad, one of Israel's intelligence-gathering agencies.

As stated, the Ministry of Defense was given the legal mandate to deal with households that had lost a member in operations against the Arabs after 29 November 1947. The boundaries of that mandate left Shelach to deal with the survivors of Etzel casualties.<sup>62</sup> About 260 persons fell during National Liberation Organization operations. The majority left families without any source of support. According to the government's decision, also transmitted by the Ministry of Defense to its delegation in the United States, these families were supposed to receive assistance similar to that provided to the survivors of Hagana fallen.<sup>63</sup> In response to the de facto dearth of

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<sup>61</sup>Shamir, Y., date, personal interview, Tel Aviv.

<sup>62</sup>Shelach, 1950, *Summary Report, 15 April 1949 to 31 October 1950*, p. 11, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\12 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>63</sup>The Office of the Soldier and the Fighter, Welfare Department, the Herut Movement, 21 January 1949, letter to Gordon, Y., Chairman, the Division for Servicemen's Return and Rehabilitation. Ministry of Defense, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 8\22 - 17. (Hebrew)

support, Shelach provided legal counseling, advice regarding the rights of the disabled, and intervention when necessary.

We summoned and urged...all the underground's disabled veterans who have been recognized by official agencies to turn to the Ministry of Defense with their claims, we assisted them in solving many conscription problems for the underground's fallen and achieved recognition of the rights of their dependents — their bereaved parents. We should note the fact that many among the bereaved families and the disabled do not turn to the Ministry despite the fact that those cases have been promised assistance.<sup>64</sup>

The endless bargaining between Shelach and the Ministry of Defense over inclusion of Etzel and Lehi fallen among IDF dead was fruitless. Shelach adopted a moralist attitude and demanded "treatment equal to those awarded the [IDF] casualties' families" in order to avoid "intensification of the discrimination and hunger among families whose breadwinners had sacrificed their lives to defend and liberate the homeland."<sup>65</sup> The institutional structure remained adamant. It was oblivious to the personal, moral element of their position and was conscious only of the broader implications of a change in its policy. In this way, Ben Gurion's position — "we will not equate Etzel with the Hagana"<sup>66</sup> — materialized in practice.

Thus, Shelach dealt with, supported and accompanied "all those dozens of families whose sons fell...[prior to and] during the War of Independence against the foreign tyrant...."<sup>67</sup> Another task, shared with HaLochamim, was the treatment of those soldiers from the underground who were missing in action. Parents would claim

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<sup>64</sup>Shelach, October 1956, *The Association and Its Activities During 1956-1957*, p. 3, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\12 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>65</sup>Herut Movement, 6 December 1948, letter to Tzadok, M., Head, Personnel Division, IDF, cited in *Herut*, 24 February 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>66</sup>Ben Gurion, D., 1951, *Diaries*. Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, entry dated 26 March 1950. (Hebrew)

<sup>67</sup>Shelach, 1950. *Summary Report, 15 April 1949 to 31 October 1950*, p. 11, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\12 - 167. (Hebrew)



that the attitude toward the bodies of the sons, who were buried in Arab villages, was discriminatory when compared to the attitude toward IDF soldiers missing in action. For example, consider the case of a family whose son was executed after attempting to penetrate:

...the headquarters of the [Arab] bands in Nablus in order to blow it up...he was caught in the Arab village of Taibe and buried in Kfar Seer, in the proximity of Jenin. The family turned to all the relevant institutions about searching for the grave and returning the body for interment in Israel...no response whatever has been received to date...we are protesting to the Ministry of Defense in the name of the family, members of Mifleget HaLochamim.<sup>68</sup>

The bulk of the resources available to Shelach were dedicated to these humanitarian activities, which required it to recruit large sums of money. Funds were collected in the United States and South Africa in order to send the wounded to the United States to undergo complex operations." At the time the [Welfare] Department was set up, about 190 individuals required medical treatment as a result of their participation in Etzel operations. The majority of cases fully recovered after appropriate medical treatment in hospitals, convalescence centers and National Sick Fund clinics...."<sup>69</sup> In addition:

...the Department is striving to guarantee the rights of the underground's casualties at the Movement's community centers in Yad Eliyahu and Shikun HaVatikim in Kiryat Shalom. The Department has also arranged for the return of three Etzel prisoners from exile (two in Germany and one in the UK) and for their rehabilitation after their return to Israel. The Department has likewise maintained contact with prisoners from the Old City [of Jerusalem] and from Mishmar HaYarden as well as with their families.

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<sup>68</sup>Secretariat, Mifleget HaLochamim, 17 April 1950, letter to the Chief Military Rabbi, Mifleget HaLochamim Archives, Beit Yair, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)

<sup>69</sup>Shelach, 1950, see fn. 67.



Shelach would follow up and procure medical treatment for Etzel veterans who, as a result of parliamentary activity following futile court cases, were eventually included among the community of IDF disabled veterans. "The Department's approval provides the basis for compensation claims. Ninety-five percent of those presenting claims obtained a full settlement and authorization for compensation."<sup>70</sup> With time, the number of cases handled by Shelach rose to 250. For those counted among the underground, Shelach provided the sole framework of support. Shelach was, then, "the only address to which they could turn in their hour of need."<sup>71</sup>

Shelach organized branches (called "committees") throughout the world. The most important were to be found in the United States, Canada, Central and South America (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela), South Africa and Australia. These committees prepared shipments of food and clothing as well as financed the therapy for the disabled who managed to go abroad and, in a number of cases, the entire course of their rehabilitation. Herut Knesset members, especially Menachem Begin,<sup>72</sup> who headed the contingent to South Africa,<sup>73</sup> and Chaim Landau journeyed to these countries to gather contributions.

Shelach's activities abroad disturbed the Hagana's supporters. Despite the closure of the Israeli space to the underground's activities and to the transfer of public funds, Hagana veterans feared that the collection of contributions abroad would elude local barriers. After the Israeli elite had succeeded in abolishing "The American League for a Liberated Israel," one of Shelach's branches, a worried *Al HaMishmar*, the Israeli daily identified with Mapam, would write:

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Shelach, undated, placard, apparently sent to Herut Movement members on the eve of Remembrance Day, 1958, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17\5 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>72</sup>Welfare Department, Shelach, undated, internal document. (Hebrew)

<sup>73</sup>Shelach, October 1956, *The Association and Its Activities During 1956-1957*, p. 4, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\12 - 167. (Hebrew)

Although the League has been officially disbanded, it continues to collect funds and distribute distorted propaganda...Its [Shelach's] new fund raising campaign for the 'Rehabilitation Fund for Discharged and Injured Etzel Soldiers' is ignoring Ben Gurion's announcement that the Government of Israel will care for all the injured discharged soldiers, irrespective of their movement or party identification.<sup>74</sup>

The activities engaged in by Shelach and its committees prompted the elite to act to constrict Shelach's fundraising activities abroad. On 26 October 1948, a cable was sent from the Ministry of Defense to Israel's Consul in the United States after the Ministry had been informed of the scope of Shelach's fundraising activities. The cable clearly stated that: "The Government of Israel views itself as responsible for the provision of assistance to those of Etzel's members who were wounded prior to that organization's dissolution and to do so to the same level as that given to the Hagana's disabled."<sup>75</sup> Israel's government was desirous of making it clear to the Jewish organizations abroad that there was no need for additional fundraising and that the activity launched by Shelach was superfluous. An internal Shelach document noted that: "These funds, which have not been authorized by the Jewish Agency or by the Board of Directors of the United Jewish Appeal, are the objects of fierce opposition and any public figure openly supporting the project must confront pressure of the strongest kind...Shelach...is not, in general, viewed in favor by the official institutions of the Israeli Government or of the Jewish Agency," the latter two doing their utmost to constrain Shelach's activities abroad at the same time that they refuse to allocate it any funds, as stipulated in the law. "Shelach was not interested in operating independent projects abroad and therefore turned to the United Jewish Appeal with the appeal that it received its portion of the funds raised...Our request

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<sup>74</sup>Cited in *Herut*, 24 February 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

left unanswered, we had no choice but to engage in independent projects and to establish Shelach branches in those same countries."<sup>76</sup> In Australia as well Shelach's envoy was able to report establishing "branches in Sydney and Melbourne despite the opposition of the official Jewish institutions there...."<sup>77</sup> Other, smaller projects were also initiated in order to recruit funds for the support of the dependent families. These included "a market was held at Metzudat Zeev, charity balls were held in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, [and] special film showings took place throughout the country...."<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Herut Knesset members donated half their salaries to Shelach's coffers.<sup>79</sup>

Dov Gruner and Yaakov Wise left no surviving family. Shlomo Ben Yosef's family was killed in the Holocaust. Uri Avneri was to write: "The crucial factor was not economic. Economic wounds heal. The wound's to a man's soul can remain open, to fester until his final hours." Following Avneri, it should be stressed that from the perspective of the families, economic claims were not at the heart of the issue: The majority was able to make ends meet with the help of Shelach or other organizations. What they desired most throughout this period was official recognition by the State of Israel.

### **Summary — Only Ben Gurion**

The vitriolic confrontations over legislation exhibited an additional issue that hovered, it appears, above every aspect of Israel's public administration during the period covered by this research: Ben Gurion's exclusive control over policy. His sway was felt in the principles, values and policy objectives that emerged in Knesset activity. As the supreme authority in the political sphere, his power was unshakable, to the point

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<sup>76</sup>Shelach, 1950, *Summary Report, 15 April 1949 to 31 October 1950*, p. 2. the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\12 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Kremerman, R., 11 September 2001, personal interview, the Jabotinsky Institute.



of smothering any spark of an idea that ran counter to his own viewpoints. His obstinate determination to view the Revisionists as "dissidents" or "rebels" and to exclude their survivors from the family of the bereaved was not shared by his colleagues in Mapai. On the tenth anniversary of Israel's independence, during the debate over the *Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (1954)*, Beba Idelson (MK, Mapai) stated that:

the question regarding the widows and orphans of those who fought among the ranks of organizations such as Etzel and Lehi, represented an opportunity to remove the partition dividing widows and orphans. It would be to our honor, to the nation's honor, if we, at the tenth anniversary [of our independence] were wholeheartedly to do so, and to cease to discriminate between widows and between children...I turn to you and ask that you find a way.<sup>80</sup>

Idelson's wish was for the Knesset to discontinue their politicization of bereavement:

We are not about to enter into an historical argument over the justice of the ideological paths taken by the fallen...such arguments can be conducted among the living, let us leave the dead in peace and tend to their families just as we tend to the families of those who fell in the War...We are obligated to do so in memory of the victims.<sup>81</sup>

Nor did Mapai Knesset members consistently object to Herut and HaLochamim demands. During the debate over the Lankin (MK, Herut) and Yellin-Mor (MK, HaLochamim) proposal regarding Etzel and Lehi wounded during the entire period of the conflict with the British within legislation, many Mapai Knesset members preferred to abstain rather than vote against the amendment.<sup>82</sup> The directive regarding party discipline was imposed by Ben Gurion himself. His reasons may have

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<sup>80</sup>Idelson, B. 12 May 1952. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

been historical: To preserve the legitimacy of his decisions regarding the anti-underground "Hunting Season," during which Etzel activists were persecuted and often handed over to the British. Or, they may have been calculated and rational: to prevent legitimization of a political rival.

It appears that Mapai's undisputed head, who had been unwavering with respect to the imposition of his authority during the pre-State period, was to remain wedded to this position, ready to castigate any group that had dared to contradict him. "The law does not delegate to the Minister of Defense the implicit power to include Etzel and Lehi disabled veterans [within its framework]," wrote Uri Avneri with respect to the *Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Amendment (1954)* law. He was referring to the clause delegating discretion over eligibility to the Minister of Defense. This clause was interpreted as a statement recognizing Hagana veterans as having rights equal to those of IDF veterans:

Other laws, such as the *Law: Military Cemeteries*, *Law: Veterans Disabled Prior to Establishment of the State*, *Law: Families of Soldiers Who Fell in the War of Independence*...all incorporate the same wording: '...every service that the Minister of Defense declares to be so, as published in the *Reshumot*, as military service for this purpose.'

In every instance when rights were extended to Etzel and Lehi members who had been wounded after 30 November 1947, the day the United Nations declared establishment of the State of Israel, not one openly cited Etzel or Lehi by name. This was all that was written: "I declare herein that participation in any planned activity against the Arab bands and invading armies will be recognized as military service for the purposes of the indicated law." Thus, Etzel and Lehi dead who had been killed or wounded during the War of Independence, or fought against the Arabs, were awarded rights whereas those who had died or been wounded in the underground's struggle



against British rule were not. Avneri continued: "The death of a son is a horrible blow dealt to every family...the death of a son, with no guaranteed compensation to be awarded to the family to ensure its survival is doubly painful. However, that blow is a thousand times more painful when the nation repudiates the freshly dug grave by denouncing that son as a pariah, a traitor."<sup>83</sup>

The uneasiness incited by the ongoing legislation's design was not the sole property of the press. In a published article, Rabbi M. Norick (MK, HaPoel HaMizrachi) argued that "the religious front naturally objects to discrimination; after the proposal for the convening of a special committee [on the subject] was rejected, members of the front abstained from voting." Norick continued that the events surrounding the decision resemble his:

...experience as an elected representative abroad, when the government demanded that those members of parliament who were covert communists be tried and unseated. I was then the only Jew among all the members from the Commons that voted against the law. Hence, I did not always agree with the underground's actions, which sometimes caused spiritual damage and sometimes material damage. But the undeniable fact is that the underground sacrificed themselves on the homeland's alter, in rapturous love for their people and their country...They climbed the scaffold singing *HaTikva* [the national anthem], with *Shema Yisrael* [a declaration of faith] on their lips. We cannot desecrate the graves of Israel's sacred and pure heroes, Jewish patriots, who gave everything, everything. We do not have the right to disgrace their bereaved mothers or ostracize their widows...and orphans. We cannot ignore their disabled...Thus, even though I am a member of the coalition and a veteran member of parliament, loyal to my party, as well as a friend and admirer of the Prime Minister...I cannot deny my conscience... My heart has been lightened...[for I can admit] that I have not shed blood nor discriminated against others."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>*HaOlam HaZeh*, 8 April 1958. (Hebrew)

<sup>84</sup>Norick, ...name, *Maariv*, 19 April 1949. (Hebrew)



### **Subjectivity**

In general, legislation in the period following achievement of Israel's independence was devised so as to differentiate between the community that contributed to the independence project, those who had sacrificed themselves in its name, and those who did not, on the basis of the accepted political criteria. Identification of the fallen and their bereaved parents, as well as the ordinary soldiers who paid the price for independence and sovereignty was integral to this activity. Formal, objective criteria for such differentiations are readily available. One dictionary defines those who died in the course of their military duty as: "deceased, murdered, dead, fallen, departed."<sup>85</sup> Another defines the concept thusly: "A soldier who died as a result of the injuries acquired on the battlefield or in a combat accident."<sup>86</sup> However, the political legislation that was orchestrated under Ben Gurion's baton ignored such definitions. Ben Gurion exploited parliamentary legislative mechanisms as if they were primary assets, raw materials to be used in the construction of political barriers against opposition groups that might wish to stake claims in the historical events that endowed the dominant party and its leader with political legitimacy. Those events were presented by Ben Gurion as a project completed exclusively by the IDF and the Hagana, to the astonishment of opposition members who declared that "the armed forces are not pawns in a gameplayed between the opposition and the regime or the government; the armed forces are the property of the entire nation."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Avineon, E., 2000, *Word by Word, A Thesaurus of the Hebrew Language*, Holon: Itav. (Hebrew)

<sup>86</sup> Even-Shoshan, E., 1969, *Hebrew-Hebrew Dictionary*, Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer. (Hebrew) Even-Shoshan based his definition on the Biblical verse: "Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fell down slain in mount Gilboa" (Samuel, 31:1).

<sup>87</sup> Meridor, Y., 16 January 1950, comments made in the debate regarding *Law: Military Service*, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

In effect, after years of political delegitimation based on their daring to deny the authority so central to Ben Gurion's being, Etzel and Lehi veterans expected no change in public attitudes toward them. They were fully aware that just as in the period of the Yishuv, contemporary legislation was motivated by politics:

...it is clear that the government will recognize only those Etzel wounded soldiers who participated in authorized operations; [it is also clear] that this list will undergo 'review,' investigated and confirmed by Hagana veterans. The question of how we are to define 'authorized operation' also demands a response. The reasons for the government's refusal are political. Government acceptance of responsibility for the underground's wounded would acknowledge the war waged by Etzel against the oppressor — contrary to the will and against the decisions made by the national institutions.<sup>88</sup>

But more: Recognition of the dead and wounded of those violators of Ben Gurion's authority would be interpreted as admission of the error of their past exclusion.

Knesset members belonging to other factions also grasped the character of the interests driving legislation. "I do not think that we need place ourselves among those nations that rewrite their history every few years according to the era's politics," argued Avraham Stopf (MK, General Zionists).<sup>89</sup> The Knesset did not, however, need to formulate hypotheses regarding Ben Gurion's aims: the State itself provided them. When bereaved families from Etzel and Lehi turned to the Ministry of Defense with the request to recognize their sons and daughters as state dead despite their deaths prior to 29 November 1947, it was Ben Gurion, as the sitting Minister, who responded:

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<sup>88</sup>Herut Movement, 6 March 1949, letter to Herut's representatives in Paris, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 8\22 - 17. (Hebrew)

<sup>89</sup>Stopf, A. 16 January 1950, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

On what basis does Begin claim the right for recognition of Etzel...Confirmation that a person served from 1 January to 30 May in an operation against the [Arab] bands will not lead me to recognize Etzel. I must prevent discrimination between the Hagana and others who were active during the same period and for the same purpose, although I will never accept Etzel as equivalent to the Hagana.<sup>90</sup>

It appears, then, that irrespective of the objective-historical and/or rational-political justifications for excluding Etzel and the other underground organizations from Israel's collective memory, the genuine reasons for doing so were ultimately subjective.

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<sup>90</sup>Ben Gurion, D., 1951, *Diaries*, Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, entry dated 26 March 1950. (Hebrew)



## **Chapter Three**

### **Commemorative Landscapes: The Politics of Hegemony in Physical Space**

The activities described in this chapter represent another layer in the structure of practices initiated by Mapai, Israel's dominant party. The boundaries of these practices marked Mapai, its supporters, and the institutions it controlled as the main contributors to the independence project. By delineating these boundaries, Mapai was able to exclude contributions made by Etzel and Lehi from the memory sites — monuments and state cemeteries — constructed in physical space. Thus, this chapter will show that Israel's landscape, like the other areas available for intervention, was not spared Mapai's appropriation.

This chapter begins with an historical survey of Labor Movement attempts, begun prior to the establishment of the State, to structure a national commemoration project that reflected its ethos and desired narrative and thereby identify the nation's story with its own. Next, the chapter describes the institutions founded after independence for the purpose of sustaining the material dimension of collective memory. These institutions were of two orders, each reflecting a distinct political camp. The first was composed of state organizations mandated to implement state commemoration policy as formulated by Mapai's leadership. The second set of institutions, founded by the underground's veterans, strove to penetrate recognition of its dead and their contributions into those same landscapes. The third part of the

chapter illustrates how this policy was executed, with an emphasis on the conflicts that raged between the organizations over the commemoration practiced at specific memory sites. Following, the fourth part discusses how the major state projects initiated in physical space — military cemeteries — and burial policy reflected Mapai's exclusion of the underground from these sites as well.

### **Beginnings of the Commemoration Project in Physical Space**

An authentic expression of Labor's conceptual hegemony can be found in the monument dedicated to the defenders of Kibbutz Hulda.<sup>1</sup> The statue, entitled *Work and Defense*, erected under the auspices of the Jewish National Committee and the Histadrut, was planned and produced by the sculptress Batia Lishansky, the sister of Rachel Yanait (wife of the future president of Israel, Yitzhak Ben Zvi). Three figures appear on the statue, those of Efraim Tchizik, who was killed during the Arab attack on Hulda during the 1938 riots; his sister, Sarah, who was killed at Tel Hai; and another person. Although the monument was intended as a memory site dedicated to military operations, the statue places figures representing those operations beside symbols of agricultural labor and settlement activity. Beneath these figures, at the base of the statue, is a plaque displaying tools used to work fields of grain. Thus, in figurative content as well as in name, the statue expresses the Labor Movement's ethos: the marriage of defense and agricultural settlement. The Movement had attempted to create symbiosis between the pioneer who redeems the nation's land with the sweat of his brow and the soldier who protects his people by the strength of his

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1929 riots, hundreds of Arabs attacked the isolated agricultural training station situated in the midst of Arab territory. A group of 23 Hagana fighters managed to thwart the attack, during which their commander, Efraim Tchizik, was killed. That evening, the British troops and Arab police who arrived forced the defenders to vacate the farm. During the War of Independence, the farm was used as a base for the Hagana's defense of Jerusalem.

sword.<sup>2</sup> Implicit in this symbolic presentation, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, is the myth surrounding Yosef Trumpeldor, the "builder and warrior." Trumpeldor presented an image of the hero that only wished to work the land but was forced to defend it, his one hand holding a rifle instead of the desired plowshare.

Attending the Hulda monument dedication ceremonies on 26 August 1937 were representatives of all the Yishuv's national institutions, envoys from the Mandatory government, America's delegates to the Zionist Congress then visiting Israel, members of the Tchizik family, and the surviving Hulda defenders. In an article in the same day's issue of *Davar*, Rachel Yanait, a member of the committee convened to select the monument's design, referred to the statue:

It is not simply a monument to an unknown soldier sent by leaders to the battlefield to die, but a monument to living workers, individuals who, motivated by inner personal drive yet conscious of the general good, devoted themselves to construction and creation; through their labor they defended us all.<sup>3</sup>

Yitzhak Ben Zvi, Chairman of the Jewish National Fund, spoke at the ceremony in the name of the Executive Committee of the Histadrut, noting that:

...the incident at Hulda ...has become the moral property of the entire Yishuv, of the entire nation...its story will be repeated by the coming generations...Hulda to the south and Tel Hai to the north are but two links in a chain.<sup>4</sup>

Yanait and Ben Zvi thus expressed Labor's purpose behind the monument's erection — commemoration was meant to remind us that striking roots in Israel

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<sup>2</sup> Shapiro, Y. 1984, *Elites Without Successors: Generations of Israel's Political Leadership*, Tel Aviv: Sifriat HaPoalim, p. 110. (Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> *Davar*, 28 June 1937. (Hebrew)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



involved defending the land.<sup>5</sup> Commemoration of Hulda was thus linked to the Zionist narrative, the story of Tel Hai. Thus, in Volume I of *Sefer Toldot Hahagana (History of the Hagana)*, we find that "Tel Hai symbolized Hulda, ...the bravery of the Yishuv's pioneers."<sup>6</sup>

The Hulda and Tel Hai monuments, both erected in the 1930s, represent institutional Zionism's first memory sites in physical space. Although commemorative monuments had been erected during the 1920s, these were initiated by a plethora of private, voluntary groups, operating alongside the established, pre-State bodies — the National Committee, the Zionist Federation, the Histadrut, and the Jewish Agency<sup>7</sup> — where commemoration policy was actually made. The Hulda and Tel Hai memory sites soon entered the channels of the social communication network, first and foremost through the commemorative rituals that became a permanent fixture of Yishuv life. This process was supported by the financial and institutional control of the messages transmitted. Shamir's research indicates that: "The [Yishuv's] formal institutions viewed themselves as responsible for the construction of collective memory during the formative days of Israel's national society."<sup>8</sup> In contrast, the voluntary initiatives, financed by donations and the fallen soldiers' families, were rather modest and, due to their private nature, incapable of penetrating national consciousness as collective memory sites.<sup>9</sup>

Analysis of official commemoration initiatives can help us identify the spirit of the time that the national institutions were desirous of constructing. Thus, for

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<sup>5</sup> Shamir, I., 1996, *Commemoration and Memory*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 25. (Hebrew)

<sup>6</sup> Dinur, B., 1959, *Sefer Toldot Hahagana*, Volume I, Part One, Tel Aviv: Maarachot, Ministry of Defense p. 378. (Hebrew)

<sup>7</sup> Shamir, I., 1992, *The Farmers of pre-State Israel*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tel Aviv University, Department of Political Science, p. 367. (Hebrew)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 382.

<sup>9</sup> For example, groups such as the Bnei Binyamin Association, Petach Tikva, and the *Shomer* (Protectors Society), Ben Shemen.

example, although erected after independence, the Negba commemorative monument sculpted by Rappaport (1953) effectively expresses Labor Movement values and the majority of the political elite's ideological expectations.<sup>10</sup> In effect, the Negba site transmits meanings similar to those represented by the Hulda monument, that is, a variant of the story of national rebirth:

The soldier's uniform was like that of the kibbutznik, except for his shirt, whose tails were snugly fitted in his belted trousers, and his laced shoes, worn in place of sandals. The similarities signify that both figures — the soldier and the kibbutznik — were fashioned from the same stuff, members of the same family, the Labor family, workers, men of the soil, and that only when needed to protect the land would they gird their weapons. These two, who are really one, hold the plowshare with one hand and a sword with the other.<sup>11</sup>

This work repeats the image of the ideal soldier-hero: a young man holding a rifle against a background of agricultural implements — a hoe — and symbols of the produce grown at Negba — sheaves of wheat, clusters of grapes, olive branches. According to Levinger, those who solicited the work, like its creator, were intent on capturing the victorious ethos of the Labor Movement's pioneer ideology. As Gamzo states, the Labor's leadership was interested in transforming the conduct of the Negba defenders into an edifying example: "Such monuments display significant educational as well as artistic values, embodied in their attempt to construct the image of a people, especially its youth."<sup>12</sup> The site's brochure details this message: "Negba is a symbol of perseverance, a paean to all the nation's heroes who paid the price of our nation's

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<sup>10</sup> Describe the Negev incident

<sup>11</sup> Gamzo, C. 1957, *Israeli Sculpture*, Tel Aviv: Michlol, unpagged; cited in Levinger, A. 1993, *Commemorative Monuments in Israel*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, p. 21. (Hebrew)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

independence."<sup>13</sup> Negba did in fact become a popular site for organized visits by groups of schoolchildren and members of the Gadna, the pre-military training units established in Israel's high schools.

Contrary to Mapai's success in presenting the War's victories as the products of its leadership in the form of material objects placed in the visible landscape we find Etzel and Lehi failure to do likewise. They preferred a different historical epic, belonging to another tradition: that of loners, of an underground that went against the accepted policy of collaboration with the British invaders; they were involved in a rebellion meant to alter the course of the Zionist Movement and the nation's history.

As viewed by their members, Etzel and Lehi were the progeny of a different movement — Nili, a group of "renegade" Jews who had co-operated with Allied intelligence during World War I in the hope of ensuring future Jewish settlement in Palestine. This group had also been expunged from official memory by Labor yet appropriated by the underground as a model for emulation. The story of Nili provided a source of strength and meaning for underground members faced with the political ostracism forced upon them. They believed that the day would soon come when Nili's legacy would be recognized and accepted by the Israeli public.

Nili's objective was to hasten liberation of Palestine from the oppression of Ottoman rule; it hoped to do so by joining the Allied effort to weaken the Turkish hold over Palestine. Such a goal was considered inappropriate and potentially dangerous by the Yishuv's leadership. Yishuv attitudes toward Nili during and after the period of its activity closely resembled Labor's attitudes toward Etzel and Lehi.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Voice of Negba* 11, 9 May 1953, p. 6. (Hebrew)



At the outbreak of World War I, the Zionist leadership adopted a policy of neutrality though some of its factions sided with either Germany or the Allies. The *Poalei Tziyyon* party spoke in favor of Palestine's integration within the Ottoman political sphere. David Ben Gurion and Yitzhak Ben Zvi, then studying in Constantinople, imagined that they would one day represent Palestine as delegates to the Ottoman parliament. When the war broke out they exhorted the Yishuv's residents to accept Ottoman sovereignty. Even the *Shomer*, a voluntary defensive association enjoying full elite backing, was pro-German: As early as 1913, Yisrael Shohat, its leader, suggested that a civilian militia be established within the framework of the Turkish army. Few Yishuv residents or community leaders were willing to adopt a pro-British stance in view of Ottoman occupation of Palestine. Among the leaders outside Palestine who did take a pro-British position were Dr. Chaim Weitzman, who paved the way for Britain's Balfour Declaration, and Zeev Jabotinsky, who founded the Jewish Battalions that fought beside the British on the Eastern Front during the First World War.

Nili members strongly objected to Ottoman rule. Sara Aaronsohn, one of its founders, had personally witnessed the Turkish massacre of the Armenian community in 1915 while on her way home to Zikron Yaakov from Constantinople. The career of Yosef Lishansky, Nili's founder, was similar to that of Jabotinsky in that he, too, had been a member of Poalei Tziyyon. The departure of Lishansky's faction from the party incited public condemnation of Nili, rationalized by the its members' rejection of Yishuv authority. Aaron Aaronsohn, Avshalom Feinberg, Sara Aharonson and Yosef Lishansky, the group's leaders, were considered to be rash young people who dared to object to the Turkish presence in contradiction of the Yishuv policy of co-operation. Nili's actions were portrayed as endangering the entire community, and potentially

inviting a massacre similar to that experienced by the Armenians. Although the details of the group's demise lie beyond the framework of this study, the treatment of its memory by the ruling elites is more than relevant for the pattern that it established.

To illustrate, Lishansky was persecuted for his views even after death. Apprehended on 19 October 1917, he was incarcerated in Damascus and sentenced to death by a military tribunal. In 1919, his body and that of Na'aman Belkind, who was also hanged in Damascus, were laid to rest in Rishon LeTziyyon. His grave was frequently desecrated and many attempted to prevent public mention of his activities.<sup>14</sup>

Avshalom Feinberg was killed in 1917 in the Gaza area under mysterious circumstances. A monument in his memory, erected south of Hadera four decades later by his family with the aid of the Hadera municipality and the local Farmers Association, received no government support.<sup>15</sup> Its dedication was organized by the city founders, which included the Feinberg family and members of the Association, on the "fortieth anniversary of his death in the Sinai Desert."<sup>16</sup> At its dedication on 20 January 1957, a plaque was displayed with the inscription: "A testament to Avshalom...founder of the underground dedicated to liberation of the nation during World War I...who fell in the Sinai Desert for the sake of Israel's independence...."

Until as late as 1930 the heirs of the Shomer and the Labor Movement saw to it that the story of the first Zionist underground (or "liberation movement" in current parlance) and the bravery displayed by its members was excised from collective memory. After establishment of the State, the history of Nili continued to be viewed

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Shamir, I. 1992, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Noted on the formal invitation to the event and included in the visit report written by the Commemoration Unit, cited by Shamir, 1992, p. 23.

negatively and remained outside the established myths. No mention of the group could be found in the official historiography until after Herut came to power in 1977. One of the first authors to describe the events in a positive light, I. Yaari Poleskin, was forced to add a question mark to the title of his book: *Spies or National Heroes?*<sup>17</sup> Nili was also totally boycotted by the education system and its textbooks. Mention of the group and its exploits was heard only in Beitar clubhouses. As part of the Revisionist counter-culture, Beitarists adopted their messages and symbols, which were still considered illicit, in solidarity with others who had also been denied entry into the collective memory project. Parallel to its absence from literary and symbolic space, Nili remained more or less absent from physical space as well.

### **Organizations**

National independence created a new context for the production of collective memory in physical space: the shared landscape. In these circumstances, use of space is no longer the prerogative of spontaneous initiatives launched by one or another group; it is a public good whose development is determined by the public administration and legislation. Despite this change in the essence of this space, numerous bodies continued practices they had become accustomed to in the pre-State era. So, these organizations would sporadically erect commemorative monuments while neglecting to co-ordinate their actions with the authorities. For instance, during the early 1950s, the Ministry of Defense decided to convene a special committee to help determine which monuments would be raised under its auspices. On 21 July 1953, the Ministry of the Interior's Assistant Director for Planning authorized the creation of the Council for National Monuments and agreed to transfer responsibility for the maintenance of

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<sup>17</sup> *The Voice of Negba*, undated, no. 10. (Hebrew)



monuments to local councils.<sup>18</sup> Yet, centralization of authority was not implemented in practice. Two years later, in response to a legislative query, the Office of the Minister of Defense responded that many monuments had been erected without approval from the Commemoration Unit, and that any group interested in doing so should see to obtaining approval.<sup>19</sup> The response indicates the elite's unwillingness to act in favor of projects it did not itself promote. Viewed differently, this comment indicates the freedom with which some organizational actors acted in the framework of commemoration. Thus, the political history of commemoration in Israel is also, to a significant degree, the political history of the organizations involved.

Seventy-five percent (about 160) of all the statues erected by official agencies in memory of the War of Independence represent a patriotic landmark to the events that furthered the cause of national liberation. "Their location, the descriptions of the event as inscribed upon them, and the listing of the dead's names represent milestones in the nation's history. These were gradually perceived as historical evidence by those who erected them as well as by the public, with their place consolidated in collective memory."<sup>20</sup> These monuments symbolized the group to which the nation owed its very being: "On the monuments are engraved the dead's names and sometimes their ages; often, the emblem of the Palmach, the Hagana, the IDF or the unit to which they belonged appears as well...."<sup>21</sup> Missing were the names of the underground groups, their fallen and the incidents during which they had lost their lives. Throughout the 1950s, commemoration of Etzel and Lehi dead was excluded from the agenda of official commemoration projects with some exceptions, those independently-funded

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of the Interior, 15 September 1953, internal memorandum, IDF Archives, 49\73-81. (Hebrew)

<sup>19</sup> Query No. 2155, 3 July 1955, IDF Archives 49\73-81. (Hebrew)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Shamir, I., 1996, pp. 389-390.

initiatives produced largely on the municipal level but which nonetheless agitated the Labor elite.

Just how weighty were the political interests that determined these policies can be learned from a letter written by a Ministry of Defense official, A. Gilad, in response to the announcement about a proposed "Anniversary of IDF Martyrs and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier." With respect to the construction of the Tomb, Gilad pithily noted that "the most important element affecting choice of the site is the political factor"; continuing, he wrote: "The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier must be located in the nation's capital."<sup>22</sup> In this case, however, the political considerations referred to were international in nature: In addition to its local purposes, the Tomb was meant to reinforce Jerusalem's position as Israel's capital. However, as we shall see, many internal and often narrow considerations played an important role in commemoration policy throughout Israel's history.

To all intents and purposes, Israel's commemoration project began in 1948, with Ben Gurion's order to create an administrative department — the Commemoration Unit — to centralize policy regarding construction of monuments throughout the nation's countryside.<sup>23</sup> A year after cessation of the fighting, the unit would be transferred to the Ministry of Defense and renamed "The Ministry of Defense Commemoration Unit." As such, the Unit would function as the State's institutional framework for all commemorative activities. At its head would sit E. Z. Eshkoli, a military rabbi who had served in the Jewish Battalions. After his death, he was replaced in December 1948 by Yosef Dekel, a Hagana veteran who had previously held the position of Chairman of Semech, the Hagana department

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<sup>22</sup> IDF Archives, 1551/51-199. (Hebrew)

<sup>23</sup> Azaryahu, 1995, *State Rituals*, Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, and Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, pp. 133-134. (Hebrew)

responsible for the fallen soldiers' families. The new unit was veritably a continuation of the Semech department, but now with respect to all IDF dead. The first task in its agenda was to establish military cemeteries and to gather all the bodies of the dead.<sup>24</sup> Previously, in October 1948, Eshkoli had signed a policy paper dictating establishment of a "Division for the Commemoration of Jewish Soldiers Who had Fought in the War of Independence." In January 1949, Dekel signed the document that detailed the functions of the new unit:

1. Establishment, administration and maintenance of military cemeteries.
2. Treatment of the literary commemoration of the dead.
3. Location of the bodies of soldiers missing in action.

The question to be asked, however, is why should one organizational unit combine within its mandate ceremonial as well as what may be called practical issues, the first related to the content of collective memory sites per se, the second flowing from substantive military actions? A careful reading of the reports issued by the Unit's head as well as follow up after projects denied authorization indicates that the spur to creation of a central arm to deal with all aspects of commemoration was Ben Gurion's desire to nationalize commemoration and manage it in a manner that suited his purposes. For instance, consider the initiatives criticized by the Unit (and later the Public Council attached to it) and the subsequent reports sent to the Minister of Defense, one of which, is cited here:

We occasionally discover that groups of people, bereaved parents...erect monuments at sites where battles had raged. After the monument is erected, it is discovered that other battles were also fought there and that others had died...The fact that the names of their loved ones have been omitted on the monument arouses considerable sorrow among parents...It appears to me that

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<sup>24</sup> *Devar Hashavua* (weekly supplement), 16 April 1953. (Hebrew)



within the framework of legislation, we should add a special item with respect to the raising of monuments and other commemorative activities...and to establish a council with the participation [of parents] as well as representatives of the military and experts to consider all requests to establish monuments.<sup>25</sup>

The Director General of the Ministry of Interior responded on 24 June 1953 that such a proposal had indeed been adopted and implemented in February 1953. The original proposal had been based on a suggestion made to Ben Gurion in 1949 by the Director General of the Ministry of Defense:

...in order to discuss these questions that are so crucial to the commemoration of IDF fallen and in order to obtain comments...with respect to the actions taken by the Ministry of Defense, the executive staff of the Ministry of Defense has decided to establish a Public Council to operate alongside the Commemoration Unit.

Members of the Council were to be chosen from among "representatives of each of the nation's regions and bereaved families." The first meeting of the Council had been set for 3 May 1949 at the offices of the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv.<sup>26</sup>

In early January of that same year (1949), Ben Gurion dictated the initial composition of the Council, which was altered by the time of its first official meeting in February 1949. The Council was meant to include representatives of bereaved families and public figures from every part of the country. De facto, the Council was composed exclusively of bereaved families. Its mandate, formalized by *Article 12* of the *Military Cemeteries Law (1950)* (to be discussed later), stipulated appointment of a public advisory council for the Commemoration Unit, whose members were to be

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<sup>25</sup> IDF Archives, 90\72-156. (Hebrew)

<sup>26</sup> Peri, A. General Director of the Ministry of Defense, 13 April 1949, letter to Ben Gurion, D., Minister of Defense and Dori, Y., Chief of the General Staff, IDF Archives, 580\56-375. (Hebrew)

appointed by the Minister of Defense. The Council's mission was to "advise and propose alternative programs for construction of a war memorial to commemorate the memories of our martyrs who had fallen during the War of Independence...and the creation of military cemeteries,"<sup>27</sup> the latter role delineated in the *Regulations Regarding Military Cemeteries (Responsibilities of the Public Council for Commemoration) 1956*. With respect to monuments, the Council was to offer its advice as to their raising and to co-ordinate sponsorship with the Commemoration Unit.

Ostensibly, this initiative had the potential to appease parents who might take umbrage at the "nationalization of bereavement," a policy that removed from their hands the decision as to where their sons and daughters were to be buried and what was to be inscribed on their gravestones (organized opposition to this policy was to develop only in the 1990s.) At the time these decisions were first made and translated into the Council's mandate, other trenchant criticisms could be heard. First, although the Council was staffed by bereaved parents and was meant to represent the entire "family of the bereaved," the fact that they were not elected but personally appointed by the Minister of Defense created the impression that it was a rubber stamp for Ben Gurion's decisions regarding the project.<sup>28</sup> Second, as the only candidates for seats on the council were parents legally recognized as the bereaved — that is, their children had died while serving in the IDF, the Palmach and the Hagana — parents of Etzel and Lehi dead were excluded. Discrimination was more or less total.

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<sup>27</sup> Lavon, P., Minister of Defense, 22 February 1955, request made to the Public Council's new appointees, IDF Archives. 90\72-39. (Hebrew)

<sup>28</sup> Doron, G. and Lebel, E., 2000, An Institution On Trial: The Defense Establishment Versus Bereaved Parents. *Plilim*, 9, 285-369. (Hebrew)

The identities of the Council's initial members, announced by Ben Gurion on 2 March 1951, are revealing. Among the 13 members we find Shaul Avigur, a Hagana veteran and representative of the Ministry of Defense; Yitzhak Ben Zvi, a Hagana veteran, bereaved father, and soon to be Israel's second President; Reuven Maas, father of Danny Maas, a Palmach hero; Rivka Guber, whose two sons had fallen while serving in the Hagana and who had come to symbolize a generation of bereaved mothers; Avinoam Grossman-Reuven, Ben Gurion's representative on the editorial staff of the *Gvilei Esh* (*Parchments of Fire*, part of the commemorative literature project); and Yosef Dekel, head of the Commemoration Unit. This roll call is prodigious in its organizational and political association with Ben Gurion and Mapai. It should come as no surprise, then, that during one of its first meetings, the Council should turn to Ben Gurion with the demand that "IDF dead be officially termed 'Heroes of the War of Independence,'" an appellation that would embrace Hagana dead only.<sup>29</sup>

Another supposedly unofficial body to be established was the *Yad Labanim*, a non-governmental association of bereaved parents. At its first meeting on 14 February 1950, it was decided that:

...the present committee...would be recognized by Ministry of Defense institutions, especially the Commemoration Unit, as an advisory forum on matters concerning commemoration of War of Independence dead...the Commemoration Unit will invite bereaved parents to cooperate in its commemorative activities as much as is feasible.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dekel, Y. and Ben Zvi, Y., 21 February 1951, letter to Ben Gurion, D. reporting on the decision made during the first meeting of the Public Council for Commemoration. IDF Archives, (Hebrew)

<sup>30</sup> Summary of meeting held on 15 March 1950. IDF Archives, 62-28\60. (Hebrew)



As late as 1963, in the face of highly effective private efforts to commemorate Etzel and Lehi dead, Yad Labanim, together with the Hagana Veterans Association, "decided to join efforts to erect, in Jerusalem, a public structure to be called 'The Hagana-Yad Labanim House,' a building to serve as a memorial to the fallen who had fought for liberation and as a meeting place for Hagana veterans and bereaved families." Jerusalem's Municipality even allocated a plot for the project, located in Independence Park.<sup>31</sup> Yad Labanim would initiate many similar projects in the areas of education and culture, public ceremonies and assemblies, scholarships, and other activities, but would continue to exclude underground veterans from its programs. Once again, despite the organization's outwardly public nature, parents of Etzel and Lehi dead were denied the opportunity to participate in this institution and based on the legal definition of a bereaved parent.

As noted earlier, the underground's representative organization, Shelach, was formed in response to the political and organizational constraints encountered. Herut, like those Etzel veterans who had completed a full tour of duty within the framework of the IDF, and certainly their bereaved parents, wished to be included in the statist project intended to recognize the contribution of all the fallen and honor all the bereaved families. Even before the War of Independence had ended, bereaved families had been labeled according to their political affiliation, with only some supported by the political elite. This process involved transmission of the collective meaning of death on the battlefield and the State's obligation to the surviving families and children. Inclusion within the official definition of martyrdom meant allocation of a

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<sup>31</sup> Maas, R., 4 November 1963, letter to Ben Gurion, D., the Reuben Maas Archives. (Hebrew)

moment of collective memory to the dead. Incorporation among the list of "patriots" meant public recognition of their efforts and sacrifice.

With elite monopolization of commemoration, a good number of Palmach and Hagana veterans came to head organizations that, with independence, were incorporated, as might be expected, into the official state apparatus that provided assistance to bereaved families and mounted commemorative projects. This process was echoed by Shelach, whose Herut founders argued that "the obligation to commemorate the underground's war...was betrayed by our government."<sup>32</sup>

Shelach's founders grasped the significance of their own commemoration project in its broadest sense, including its temporal dimensions: "Shelach is an institution that...battles against the distortion of history and against those who would conceal the truth. One of its objectives is to erect a memorial to those heroes so that their memories will be eternally etched in the nation's history," advertised a flyer written in 1958 on the eve of Israel's Remembrance [memorial] Day. The purpose of the flyer was to inform the public of Shelach's intention to fill the gaps in the State's commemorative projects, to penetrate the nation's collective memory as well as its landscape in keeping with its agenda.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, two organizational networks filled the public landscape with commemorative monuments. The first, official and institutionalized, operated according to a legal mandate and with Ministry of Defense blessing; it admitted participation in the project to selected groups of bereaved parents and leaders who had either lost children during the war or who were themselves Hagana or IDF veterans.

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<sup>32</sup> Annual review of Shelach's activities, presented to delegates of Herut's Third National Convention, April 1954. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 18-5-17. (Hebrew)

<sup>33</sup> Flyer mailed to members of the Herut Movement, Remembrance Day Eve, 1958. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17/5-167. (Hebrew)

The second appeared to be of no public significance and was poor in resources; yet, it adamantly sustained its program. The points of contention between them were the absence of any mention of the underground's dead from monuments erected under State sponsorship, and opposition to Shelach's attempts to raise privately funded monuments as a remedy. This split continued the pattern, formal and informal, established during the Yishuv when one set of defensive organizations operated with the sanction of the Labor-dominated institutions while another operated without it.

When trying to comprehend the meaning of this issue, we should mention a distinction Azaryahu makes in his study on commemoration in what was formerly East Germany. Azaryahu distinguishes between official and unofficial monuments that parallel the differentiation between the national and the municipal level.<sup>34</sup> Broadly speaking, monuments that contain official (i.e., national) symbols are the property of state agencies, as opposed to monuments that do not contain such symbols, which are usually erected according to local policies. Symbols such as the national flag, which appear on bank notes, coins and stamps are designed and produced with state authorization; alternatively, street names tend to be determined locally. In totalitarian regimes, the differentiation between the national and local level is devoid of political significance because the political center controls all organizations — and all vehicles for the use of symbols — on every level of government. In pluralistic societies, however, the differentiation between national and local government projects may have meaning, especially when private symbols are concerned.

With respect to commemoration in physical space, the significance of these distinctions can be weighty. The meaning or implications of official monuments

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<sup>34</sup> Azaryahu, (1995).



erected by the state or with state approval are national in scope, whereas local monuments constructed under municipal auspices are not. National monuments are incorporated into the compulsory national network of social communication through the related literature, addressed to the coming generation, included in school texts and other educational material prepared by the Ministry of Education. Such projects are also awarded with state financial support, guaranteed maintenance, and the public spotlight during the numerous rituals attended by government notables. The latter ensures media coverage of the events and intensified public exposure. Official monuments, therefore, not only convey political ideas falling within the social consensus, they display circularity: they create while they reproduce that consensus. Monuments representing ideas outside the consensus remain, a priori, removed and excluded from the state-controlled network of communication. This process likewise affects the strategy devised by a monument's initiators: Organizations within the consensus and interested in penetrating events or the war dead into the public's collective consciousness can turn to state agencies for funds and approval. Others, outside the consensus, in this case represented by Mapai's sovereignty narrative, will court municipal policy makers and seek admission into the local network of social communication.

Just how acrimonious the conflict became over commemoration in physical space of the underground and its operations is demonstrated by Ben Gurion's treatment of the remnants of the Altalena. Seen from the perspective of history, the narrative of its removal is tragi-comic, in direct proportion to the vessel's potential as the consummate memorial to Etzel and Lehi dead. Consider this scenario. Its scorched metal frame, betraying hues of burnt iron and rust, could have transmitted powerful messages by the wreck lying stranded on the Tel Aviv shore. At each anniversary of

the ship's attack, a small group might have gathered at the site to recollect where their colleagues had stood on its deck or fallen wounded on the sand, and listened to a recording of radio transmissions from that eventful night. These gatherings could have become mass events, thick with meaning, especially if conducted in the midst of electoral campaigns. The beached hulk's image might have been movingly employed to differentiate "them" from "us," to remind the audience of the underground's vision and of its betrayal by Labor, of the injustices done. As the political reporter for *Herut* indeed wrote: "The Altalena's burnt skeleton rests on the Tel Aviv shore as a monument symbolizing the civil war fought by the Jews in all its ugliness, an eternal mark of Cain."<sup>35</sup>

Such a scenario may intimate why, on 5 July 1949, 13 months after the ship had been set ablaze in the course of the IDF's attack on the vessel, Ben Gurion, as Minister of Defense, ordered its removal and oversaw its dismantling. Ben Gurion's signing of the order was based on the Mandate's *Emergency Measures (1945) and Ordinance: Government and Due Process (1948)*:

As Minister of Defense, I hereby order that the vessel known as the 'Altalena'...be confiscated by the Government of Israel due to its use as a site for criminal activities...[it] will be hauled from the water and dismantled as directed by the Commander of the Israeli Navy.<sup>36</sup>

The removal was begun, however, two weeks before the order was signed, as indicated by a message addressed to the Commander of the Navy: "Dismantle the remnants of the Altalena that has run aground in Tel Aviv. The operation is to be

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<sup>35</sup> Nakdimon, 1978, *Altalena*, Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot., p. 465 [complete]. (Hebrew)

<sup>36</sup> Dekel, Y., Director, the Division of the Navy. Letter to the Assistant Minister of Defense, 23 October 1949. IDF Archives, 580\56-260. (Hebrew); see also Nakdimon, 1978, p. 465. (Hebrew)

completed with dispatch." It was even given a name: "Operation: The Altalena Razing."<sup>37</sup>

Removing or, perhaps more appropriately from Labor's point of view, making the Altalena vanish proved to be a Sisyphean task. At first, Navy personnel tried to drag the ship from the shoals by means of rollers, floats, bulldozers, and cables. When these failed, they were assisted by navy vessels, which also proved ineffective. The Ministry then turned to a private company, *Ogen*, one of Solel Boneh's<sup>38</sup> daughter companies, again in vain. Still later, expert consultants from the US were invited to help complete the removal. The final report prepared by the Ministry of Defense notes that the operation was so unprecedented in its complexity that it provided the infant Navy with an "opportunity for intensive training in an important profession": salvaging. Instead, all these efforts led to the ship being sunk.

The original plan had been quite different: It involved towing the vessel to the port of Haifa for dismantling. This plan was cancelled when it became apparent that the Altalena could not be towed. Holes were discovered in its bottom, and divers had to be sent to mend them. It then had to be emptied of water: *Ogen* secured heavy pumps scattered throughout the country, and the navy's workshops manufactured a special pump for that purpose. In addition, the heavy equipment in its hold had to be removed so that the ship could float. Added to these technical problems, the sea was rough and safety was minimal. In order to ease the burden of the work, the government decided to free the participating workman from the rationing regime then in force. The project was overseen by Avraham Holi, a private contractor who had promised to complete the project by September 1949. The contract signed with Holi

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<sup>37</sup> See various documents, ID Archives, 580\56-260. (Hebrew)

<sup>38</sup> Solel Boneh, a construction company belonged to Hevrat Ovdim, the Histadrut's industrial arm.



allowed him to use the ship's metal and equipment at his discretion so long as he "reduced [the vessel] to pieces so as to leave no sign of any semblance of a ship." In order to complete the work, the Navy promised to lend Holi a barge, free of charge.<sup>39</sup>

In the end, after the hull had been blasted apart, another obstacle arose: the remnants could not be sunk due to air pockets. Explosives had to be used once more. "It [was] impossible to comply...with the order given...because there [was] no force in Israel that [could] extricate the ship from its resting place on the shore."<sup>40</sup>

Instead of the promised two months, the project took four months to complete. The cost was huge: about £27,000, 70% of which was paid to *Ogen* to cover labor costs. Equipment worth millions was lost to the sea, as was the cost of purchase and insurance.<sup>41</sup> It would take 50 years before the Altalena's survivors could organize a commemoration service at the site, even in the absence of a physical monument.

The removal of the Altalena contains the embryo of Israel's statist commemoration project, a project that expressed the political elite's aversion to incorporation of the conflict against British and those who fought it within the boundaries of the nation's evolving collective memory. Other, perhaps more poignant examples of this reluctance are the monuments dedicated to the fallen in other actions against the British, such as those near Kibbutz Givat Chaim and the "Night of the Bridges," the latter to be discussed shortly. The monuments to these events, erected early in Israel's history, describe the dead as falling in action after Palestine had been closed to immigration (*aliyah*) in the years immediately following the Holocaust. No mention is made of the enemy: the British. It is therefore interesting to discover that

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<sup>39</sup> Proposed contract between the Israeli Navy and A. Holi, attached to a letter from the Navy's Chief Repairs Office to its Ship Body Repairs Officer, 17 June 1949, IDF Archives, 2540\50-160. (Hebrew)

<sup>40</sup> Nakdimon, 1978, p. 466.

<sup>41</sup> See various documents, ID Archives, 580\56-260. (Hebrew)

prior to independence and the formation of an official commemoration policy, monuments commemorating the Yishuv's battle against the British can be found.

In December 1946, the cornerstone for an eternal flame was laid in Emek Hefer in memory of the seven who fell there during the British blockade of the Jordan valley settlements.<sup>42</sup> In 1947, Kibbutz Tel Yosef raised a commemorative obelisk in memory of Chaim Harudi, who was shot by the British on "Black Saturday" (29 June 1946),<sup>43</sup> while in June 1947, a commemorative plaque was placed in memory of two individuals who had fallen during attempts to assist Kfar Giladi after this kibbutz, situated in the northern Galilee, was blockaded by the British.<sup>44</sup> Following independence, Ben Gurion made a calculated decision to remove the battle against the British from the map of Israel's collective memory. The question as to why he should want to do so will be answered in the discussion. Here I will limit myself to a description of the events as they found expression in the landscape.

Commemoration of the Night of the Bridges is engrossing because it was an operation undertaken within the framework of the combined underground movements (the "Resistance Movement," late 1945 and June 1946). During this brief period the three camps — the Hagana, Etzel and Lehi — joined forces under a unified command to arrive at a common strategy against the British. The incident in question took place on 16 June 1946. Units from the three organizations were assigned to blow up bridges used by the British to transport supplies and troops throughout Palestine. During the attempt to sabotage the Achziv bridge, 14 Palmach fighters were killed.

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<sup>42</sup> *Al Hamishmar*, 16 December 1946. (Hebrew)

<sup>43</sup> Shamir, I., 1989, *The Eternal Flame: Memorials to the Martyrs of Israel's Wars*, Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publications, p. 178. (Hebrew)

<sup>44</sup> *Al Hamishmar*, 9 June 1947. (Hebrew)

On 5 December 1946, in the wake of the Achziv operation, Moshe Sneh, the commander of the underground, wrote as follows to the bereaved parents:

These 14 martyrs...join the list of national heroes and patriots that sacrificed their lives in the war for Israel and its independence. In the name of the Jewish underground movement and its members, I wish to express my deepest regret for the calamity that has befallen you...The day will come when the nation and its people will be able to openly express its gratitude and fittingly commemorate their memories.<sup>45</sup>

After independence, families of the dead turned to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Sharett, as well as to the Commemoration Unit with the request to commemorate their loved ones. In accordance with the rigid policy stipulating that the State would recognize and commemorate only those dead who had fallen after the creation of the IDF (November 1947), the parents were denied their request and formally notified of that decision by the Council for National Monuments.

The Council itself had no objection to complying with this request. However, as an instrumental body subject to the legislation and regulations formulated in the political sphere, in this case by the Minister of Defense, there was little room for discretion. Nonetheless, although the law was binding with respect to the policy of the national commemorative bodies, a loophole did exist. As noted earlier, circumvention of the law was a prerogative of the Minister of Defense, stipulated in law. This loophole had been utilized to recognize the Hagana's dead as national martyrs or war heroes. It appears that a similar strategy was eventually adopted in the current case as well.

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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Shamir, 1989, p. 59.



Nor did this policy prevent the government from establishing a settlement, Kibbutz Yechiam, in name of the commander of the Achziv operation, Yechiam Weitz. In response, a bereaved mother wrote to Ben Gurion and to Yigael Yadin, the Chief of the General Staff, expressing her distress at the neglect of the others who had fallen together with Weitz. The specific appeal was directed toward the placement of a commemorative obelisk next to the bridge which "will serve as our final link to our lost sons...and to change the name of the kibbutz to *Kibbutz Gesher Haziv*...so that its name will recall all those who fell there...." The parents' active involvement did not end there. On 29 January 1951, a parent addressed a letter to a major newspaper, which was never published (a copy can be found in the Commemoration Unit) expressing his objections to a similar act: the naming of a forest, again after Yechiam Weitz, while ignoring his fellow soldiers:

Has not severe pain been caused to the other families when only one of the 14 [martyrs] has been commemorated?...A settlement has been established, called Yechiam. Doesn't the fact that a forest has also been named after Yechiam, without mention of the other boys who fell, increase the hurt felt by the other parents...?<sup>46</sup>

This letter came into the hands of Yechiam's father, Yosef Weitz, then Director of the Jewish National Fund's (*Keren Kayemet LeYisrael*) Settlement Department, another organization that played an important part in the commemoration project thanks to the forest and recreation areas it contributed to this effort. The elder Weitz attached himself to the parents' cause and, taking advantage of his unique

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

position within the state's institutional structure, expedited several commemorative projects.<sup>47</sup>

Eventually, due to the parents' rebukes, Shaul Avigur, assistant to the Minister of Defense, ordered the head of the Commemoration Unit to respond to their wishes. These included an additional demand, made later, to "bury our sons' remains under the monument next to the bridge."<sup>48</sup> Thus, in 1955, a memorial was erected on the site of the incident. It was designed by Asher Hirem, the Unit's "house" architect, who carried out commissions fully financed by the Ministry of Defense exclusively for the Commemoration Unit. Before construction began, the Council for National Monuments transmitted the plans to the parents for their approval. But only in 1963, 17 years after their deaths, were the bodies of some of the fallen transferred from temporary graves in Haifa and interred at the monument's site. On 13 June 1968, the remains of the others' were transferred to the monument from their original common grave, also located in Haifa.

On 17 June 1946, the morning following the Night of the Bridges, 11 Lehi members were killed while trying to explode the warehouses used by the Haifa railroad. This operation, like that of the Night of the Bridges, was part of the coordinated campaign to disrupt British transport capabilities. The only governmental body to identify with the parents' grief was the Municipality of Haifa. In June 1949, the acting chairman of Haifa's City Council sent a letter in which he noted that he wished "to express his condolences on the anniversary of the deaths of the 11 fighters who fell in the attack on the railroad workshops...."<sup>49</sup> Yet, despite the "timely"

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<sup>47</sup> See relevant correspondence cited in Shamir, 1989, p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> Dekel, Y., 18 December 1949, letter to Dori, Y., Chief of the General Staff, IDF Archives, File No. 60/20-62, cited in Shamir, p. 60. (Hebrew)

<sup>49</sup> Acting Chairman of the Haifa City Council, 15 June 1949, Letter to the Lehi Party, Beit Yair Archives, Files 37 to 39. (Hebrew)

recognition of the event, a monument to the Lehi dead was erected in Kiryat Ata (a suburb of Haifa) only in 1970, on the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their deaths, as will be described in Chapter Five. Here, I review the facts of the incident and their relationship to commemorative monuments.

The attack on the railroad workshops was carried out under the combined command of the underground movements. Four individuals — Moshe Sneh and Yisrael Galili, representing the Hagana; Menachem Begin, representing Etzel; and Nathan Yellin-Mor, representing Lehi — met regularly to co-ordinate plans for the three organizations at the Tel Aviv home of Yan Yanovsky (a Hagana member who, as Yaakov Yanai, became Assistant Director General of the Ministry of Defense). The operation were planned by Yanai, Lehi's operations officer, and endorsed by the other members of the forum as part of the broader program to paralyze British movement in Palestine. Sabotage of bridges and airports was part of the plan. Lehi was given the task of blasting the workshops in order to halt rail transit, while the Hagana was assigned to sabotage various bridges, including the Achziv bridge. During the operation, Lehi broke into the workshops while under fire from the sentries; it exploded engine pistons and the bridge leading to the engine repair shop. However, while doing so, thousands of British soldiers and sentries gathered outside and blocked the surrounding streets; a curfew was immediately called. The attackers tried to drive away in a car without headlights but ran into a British tank blocking its way. British soldiers converged upon them from the open ditches lining both sides of the street and opened fire, killing 9 of the attackers. The others were captured and sent to the Acre fortress. The men in the group were sentenced to death and the women to life



imprisonment. During the Acre break-in (1947), two of the participants in the Haifa raid were killed.<sup>50</sup>

From the perspective of this dissertation, the relevance of the raid was not its intent or operational failure, but the fact that, like the Night of the Bridges, it was planned by the same unified command. Theoretically, both units could be considered equal within its paramilitary framework. That being so, the only explanation for the selective treatment of its fallen must be found in the political arena, in the power struggle between the camps that was formalized in the subsequent legislation.

What we can learn from these examples is that in order to justify the erasing of any hint of Etzel and Lehi actions against the British from the nation's collective memory, the illusion had to be created that the Hagana also suffered from legal stipulations. Hence the Council for National Monuments was formally prevented from responding to the requests of the bereaved parents of Hagana dead. However, in practice, as we have also seen, "an order was immediately given to deal with the issue."<sup>51</sup> Every detail of the treatment of the Achziv Bridge commemoration and of similar operations executed by units identified with the Labor Movement, indicate that this group of "Hagana" parents spoke with a potent political voice. The State's commemorative organs recognized that voice and responded to it by granting them the opportunity to participate in the formulation of Israel's commemoration policy. Thus, in a letter written in the fall of 1951 to the Commemoration Unit, a group of parents wrote that:

We have learned that you have finally received a directive from the higher reaches of government instructing you to end the discrimination between these

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<sup>50</sup> Avneri, U. *Haolam Hazei*, 19 June 1952. (Hebrew)

<sup>51</sup> Shamir, p. 60.

13 young men and the War's dead who served in the regular army. It appears that the time has come for a monument to be erected in the name of our dear ones...so that we will have at least one place where we can go and pay homage to their memory.<sup>52</sup>

Respite from discrimination, so it seems, was evidenced only with respect to this group, a group that, according to Shamir, "dictated the transfer of policy to the ministerial levels."<sup>53</sup>

The conduct of commemoration with respect to the underground movement emphasizes the selectivity in the elite's treatment of fallen soldiers even when their operations were conducted within a shared and mutually agreed upon framework. To review, even before the pile of correspondence demanding commemoration of his colleagues had gathered, the government established a settlement named after Yechiam Weitz, prior to which a state funeral was held, attended by the masses. "The Hagana urged large crowds into the streets so that they could pay their last respects to the dead" wrote Yellin-Mor years later in a holiday supplement of *Maariv*.<sup>54</sup> However, "[a] short time later, 11 Lehi fighters fell in the attack on the railroad workshops; their burial was arranged in secret, and no one called for the populace to accompany them on their last journey. The quorum required to conduct a funeral was assembled with great difficulty."<sup>55</sup> The workshop attack inspired no public interest and no demands for their victims' commemoration by the State. In a letter published by Uri Avneri in *HaOlam HaZeh* six years after the incident, he reproached the government for its lack of response: "This week marks the sixth anniversary of the historic attack on the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Yellin-Mor, N. 10 April 1966, *Maariv, Holiday Supplement*. (Hebrew)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

workshops; it appears that the State and all its citizens have totally forgotten the operation and those who carried it out."<sup>56</sup> *HaOlam HaZeh* was the only journal or other channel of the mass media to mention commemoration for these dead. No public figure attended other than Yellin-Mor, a former commander of Lehi.

At the time, the political behavior of the families and survivors of the workshop operation dead did not resemble those of their peers in the other camp. They addressed no claims to the government, which was still at the height of its campaign of delegitimation and persecution. In effect, it appears, they never expected the Yishuv to permit them to engage in any commemorative or related activity whatsoever, and certainly not to financially support any such acts.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, no correspondence regarding such initiatives are to be found. As stated, similar to efforts to raise the Achziv monument, the survivors of the workshops operations began to commemorate their dead only in 1966, 20 years after the event. On 8 November of that year, the Association for the Commemoration of Lehi fallen turned to the chairman of the Kiryat Ata City Council — again, the local rather than the national level — with a request to erect a memorial within the city limits.<sup>58</sup> Although a monument was raised, it still does not bear the IDF emblem, contrary to the monument at Achziv.

Revisionist Movement dead, like the dead of other combined Etzel-Hagana operations, were never to earn comparable markings, symbolic tokens of affiliation, on their gravestones. "Cemeteries do not recognize 'frameworks.' Etzel dead rest next to Hagana dead, but someone decided that even here, deceit was to enter." So wrote Chaim Lazar-Litai in the foreword to a book in memory of the Jaffa campaign's dead was edited by him and published by Shelach. He continued:

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<sup>56</sup> Avneri, U., 19 June 1952, *Haolam Hazei*. (Hebrew)

<sup>57</sup> Armoni, Hannah, 29 October 2000, personal interview.

<sup>58</sup> Kiryat Ata Commemorative Monument File, various years, Beit Yair Archives, Tel Aviv. (Hebrew)



On the top of the graves of Hagana soldiers who died protecting Jaffa hovers the phrase 'fell during the liberation of Jaffa,' whereas above the graves of Uzi and Yehoshua and all 40 who paid with their lives so that the campaign could succeed, only the words 'fell in Jaffa' are inscribed...We therefore stood before their sacred graves and felt an inexpressible anger: 'Will lies be spread even in the next world?'<sup>59</sup>

Even Yosef Weitz candidly objected to these practices, as evidenced by a diary entry dated 11 April 1951:

I met with...from the Commemoration Unit to discuss the construction of a monument to the 14 who fell at the Achziv Bridge. He, that is, the Unit, is following routine, inasmuch as the Ministry of Defense is officially responding only to cases of casualties who fell after 29 November 1947 [the date of the UN declaration announcing the partition of Palestine], and not prior to that date, so as to exclude Lehi and Etzel casualties. We are therefore continuing the ancient tradition of discrimination.<sup>60</sup>

The symbolic and political significance of efforts to exert control over the landscape were raised in several Knesset debates in relation to yet another state body: the Government Names Committee, then located within the Office of the Prime Minister. This committee had been established to assign names to the settlements springing up throughout the country; the products of its activity were entrenched in the normative conflict between the Right and Mapai, between liberalism and collectivism. The confrontation between these values framed Mapai's program to appropriate and nationalize the landscape as part of its public policy agenda, as it did Labor's attempts

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<sup>59</sup> Lazar-Litai, C., 1951, *The Conquest of Jaffa*, Tel Aviv: Shelach. (Hebrew)

<sup>60</sup> Weitz, Y., 1965, *Reminiscences and Letters to My Sons (The Settlement Period, 1949-1956)*. Ramat-Gan: Private printing, p. 134. (Hebrew)

to indicate its traditions and the symbolic politics within physical space during the Yishuv.

The naming of settlements, streets, and recreational areas encapsulates this often-bitter strife. "People living in villages established on public land and desirous of calling their settlement after a person dear to them are denied this elementary option. Someone may appear who thinks that he has the right to intervene and tell them how to name their sons and daughters" argued Herut Knesset member Esther Raziel-Naor during a debate over the Names Committee's performance. Raziel-Naor went on to label the Committee:

...an independent kingdom...I was educated within a movement where we were taught to respect heroes without asking about their politics or their party affiliation...the government and the Prime Minister have yet to find the will to properly honor those executed by the British and those belonging to the underground...they have adopted reprehensible measures to prevent recognition.

During this debate, Raziel-Naor cited instances where the Names Committee had refused to let communities founded by Etzel and Lehi veterans to call themselves as they wished. For instance, residents of a village in the Jerusalem Corridor were denied the right to call themselves "Ramat Shimon" after Shimon Amrani, killed in the attack on the Acre garrison. Instead, the Committee allotted them the name "Bar Giora," after an early twentieth-century defensive organization. Another community was "Nachlat Shlomo," a village in the Upper Galilee. Its residents wished to name themselves after Shlomo Bar Yosef, who was hanged by the British, but the Names Committee charged that they call the village "Hosen" (stalwartness). Yet another case was that of "Ramat Raziel," a community resting in the Judean Hills, originally named

after Etzel's first commander, David Raziël. This name as well was denied approval; the name "Kasalon," resembling the name of the Arab village "Kasale" that once existed in the area, was given instead.<sup>61</sup>

Residents of these communities refused to accept the Committee's decisions. They continued to call themselves by the names of their choice (e.g., Ramat Raziël, Kfar Aviel, Nachlat Shlomo, Ramat Shlomo) and returned letters to the Postal Service that were addressed to the settlement names given by the Committee. In a number of instances the Committee overturned its own decisions and allowed residents the freedom they wished. Herut Knesset members demanded that the authority to determine settlement names be removed from the Prime Minister's — that is, Ben Gurion's — office and transferred to the Knesset's Internal Affairs Committee, where they could participate in the debates. There, they believed, Ben Gurion's control over their daily lives could be somewhat attenuated.<sup>62</sup>

In face of the State's success in perpetuating Mapai hegemony through the messages transmitted by commemorative monuments and place names, Shelach began a similar set of projects. Among these was construction of the David Raziël Museum of the Jewish Underground, which would "present the underground's battle in its entirety, and will be permanently open to the public." These plans rankled the bureaucratic and Defense Ministry elites. For support, Shelach turned to the mayors of various cities and requested that they erect monuments and other municipal markers in remembrance of Etzel dead and operations. Thus, the Mayor of Jerusalem received a request in September 1957 to erect a monument to the memory of "two of Jerusalem's

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<sup>61</sup> Details of the debate can be found in the *Knesset Protocols*, the *Netzer Sereni Law*, First Reading, 3 January 1955. (Hebrew)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



heroes, Moshe Barazani (Lehi) and Meir Feinstein (Etzel)," both of whom had died "for the sake of Israel's rebirth. They blew themselves up while captives in the Jerusalem prison rather than allow the hangman to do his work." Shelach noted that these dead were buried on the Mount of Olives, a site inaccessible to Israelis at the time. In conclusion, Shelach declared that "the monument will bring glory to the capital and its residents, and be available as an educational attraction for the many young people, new immigrants, and tourists coming to Jerusalem."<sup>63</sup>

Jerusalem, where many soldiers and civilians had been killed during the War of Independence, was one of the cities willing to take on the obligation to commemorate the underground's fallen. Because this was a local initiative, the municipality did not turn to the central government for guidance. This administrative discontinuity was the salient factor that permitted Shelach, like other organizations functioning in the city, to commemorate its "own" martyrs. The first monument was erected in 1949; the second to the 18 Etzel fighters who fell in the liberation of Dir Yassin.

This, like similar projects, troubled the elite. "From the moment they are placed in the landscape, these monuments acquire a life of their own" Shamir argues.<sup>64</sup> Whether the product of state or private initiatives, an object's placement within the landscape or any other public space allows for its images, symbols and messages, as permanent objects, to be imprinted within collective memory. It is therefore quite understandable why these activities worried the political elite controlling the central government. Especially disturbed was the Commander of the Jerusalem District, who

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<sup>63</sup> Katznellenbogen, B. Letter to Agron, Gershon, Mayor of Jerusalem, 4 September 1957, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17/5-167. (Hebrew)

<sup>64</sup> Shamir, 1996, *Commemoration and Memory*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 9. (Hebrew)

sent a secret and personal letter on 29 December 1949 to the Commander of the Central Region, in which he wrote:

Shelach, founded by Etzel, is placing monuments...in various places...these monuments may, in the distant future, create the impression that the sites were conquered by the same group that placed them there...I believe that we should pass a law that will regulate permission to erect a monument, and the form it will take ... to prevent the historical distortion of the campaign to establish the State of Israel. Please bring this issue to the attention of the Ministry of Defense.<sup>65</sup>

The letter was transmitted to the head of the IDF's Personnel Division and passed on to Pinchas Sapir, the Director General of the Ministry of Defense. On 9 January 1950, Sapir wrote to Yosef Dekel of the Commemoration Unit. Fear of the same "historical distortion" continued to irk Mapai policy makers, who kept track of these so-called "biased" initiatives. Nevertheless, contrary to Ben Gurion's position, Sapir clearly instructed Dekel that he was "to be broad-minded regarding commemoration of Etzel and Lehi dead."<sup>66</sup>

Among the monuments that Shelach was to erect (such as those to the Wedgwood and Margolin units at Nordia and to the 14 casualties at Kfar Aviel), the "Memorial to the Conquerors of Dir Yassin" was particularly important because the highly charged operation had been coordinated with State institutions and its status had been confirmed by the courts (see Chapter Five, below). The decision to allocate land for construction of an obelisk in memory of the 18 Etzel dead killed during the operation was made in the Jerusalem Municipal Planning Subcommittee in response to Shelach's request. The Subcommittee's chairman, Attorney Amidor, invited Chaim

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<sup>65</sup> The IDF Archives, File 211-220\70. (Hebrew)

<sup>66</sup> The IDF Archives, File 213-220\70. (Hebrew)

Corfu and Rahamim Mizrachi, members of Shelach's Jerusalem branch, to one of its meetings in order to hear their plans. They informed the Subcommittee that the monument would be raised on the main road to the village.<sup>67</sup> Although approval was obtained in principle, the plans were never realized.

Another project involved the renovation of the Acre Fortress. The break-in conducted by Etzel and Lehi forces that succeeded in freeing many of the captives held by the British was to become part of the heritage of the two underground organizations. In order to alter the site's function, more than municipal consent was required because to the astonishment and anger of the families of those hanged there and of Etzel and Lehi veterans, the State had converted the fortress into a mental hospital run by the Ministry of Health. As Shelach charged:

It would have been more fitting to convert the Acre Fortress, whose walls had witnessed the unfolding of the epic of Jewish heroism ranging from the arrest of Zeev Jabotinsky to the armed entry of his disciples and their submission to the hangman's noose, into a national museum. The government, stubbornly continuing its policy of distortion and concealment, did not see it appropriate to respond to Shelach's petition to transform the fortress to a monument to Jewish heroism....<sup>68</sup>

Shelach's efforts did, however, bear some fruit. As described in the next chapter, the execution chamber was eventually converted into a room for solitude and communion with the dead, a commemorative site for Etzel and Lehi rituals. "We managed to save only the most hallowed space in the fortress — the execution chamber — which was kept in its original state. Commemorative plaques dedicated to

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<sup>67</sup> *Herut*, 8 July 1954. (Hebrew)

<sup>68</sup> *Herut*, 21 June 1949. (Hebrew)



each of the executed dead were placed, including one in the room where the father of the Jewish insurrection — Zeev Jabotinsky — had been jailed."<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, the bitterness flowing from the State's disregard of the mythic site did not abate:

... how will it be possible to enter a museum that is situated in a place surrounded by the mentally ill?...We have to...transform the entire fortress into a national museum. By the way, as far as I know, not one Israeli young person belonging to the circles identified with us has set foot in the execution chamber...Here, no good word from the party is needed. Here, only the 'undergrounds' have control."<sup>70</sup>

Herut fully understood the State's disdain for the fortress's history: It was meant to scorn the underground's role in the national narrative. Shelach stated it would:

...spare no efforts to expand the shrine from this point forward. We believe that one day, a pantheon to Jewish bravery will be built in the Fortress, whose walls witnessed the daring battles of our generation's Jewish rebels. We strongly believe that the commemoration project will expand throughout the land...and commemorative plaques, monuments and statues will pay homage to the rebellion's heroes and actions...before the people and the future generations as paragons of Israel's struggle for liberty. Our success is largely dependent on the public at large and its generosity, which we believe will fully materialize. Here we present to Israel's citizens the story of the 14 who were hanged, martyrs of the generation of rebellion, for the sake of our children's education...[about] the daring exploits and noble sacrifices of those who symbolize a new race of Jewish warriors.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> *Herut*, 21 June 1949. Editorial page. (Hebrew)

<sup>71</sup> Kotlovitz, R., 14 October 1956. speech. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 24\5-167 (Hebrew)

As part of the Etzel and Lehi counter-culture, the "Martyrs' Shrine" would become a major site, a pantheon to their heroes' valor. These initiatives would parallel the State's program to erect a "Heroes Shrine."<sup>72</sup> Shelach organized a special ceremony for the opening "Memorial to the Executed in Acre" on 14 October 1954, which was attended by the deads' families, Herut's officials, the surviving members of Nili, as well as Etzel and Lehi veterans.

The site was chosen to commemorate the dead beginning with those belonging to Nili, which had been incorporated into Shelach's mythology as the underground's historical predecessors.<sup>73</sup> "Anyone interested in erasing the most glorious act of heroism of our people, will fail in his schemes," read R. Kotlovitch, Shelach's chairman, from a prepared text.<sup>74</sup> Rivka Aaronsohn, Sara Aaronsohn's sister, was escorted by Herut MK Haim Landau, who represented Etzel's commander, and Yaakov Banai, a member of the Lehi command; she was invited to light a memorial candle. After a moment of silence and prayer, a letter sent by Rabbi Arielev Shalita, the rabbi of the imprisoned Russian Zionists (known as *Asirei Tziyyon*) was read. In his letter, Shalita cites the exploits of the executed as models for emulation. Also present was Zvi Dresner (his brother had been executed by the British), the spokesman for the bereaved families, who bemoaned the fact that so many in the country were ready to repudiate the deads' contributions. He used this occasion to depict daily acts that illustrated how the group present had been prohibited from entering elite circles. This estrangement was enacted in ordinary events: he relayed how a passerby had torn down the signboard on Oley HaGardom Street [named for the

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<sup>72</sup> Secretary of Shelach, correspondence to Israel Ginsburg, 16 June 1957. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17\5 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>73</sup> *Herut*, 15 October 1956. (Hebrew)

<sup>74</sup> Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 24\5 - 167.

Acre dead] in Tel Aviv. Dresner expressed hope that those commemorated at the site would find their place into Israel's collective memory not simply as heroes associated with a specific group but as "heroes of the entire nation," that is, as part of official collective memory.<sup>75</sup> Menachem Begin spoke as well, noting that the Acre site was sacred, like others that had been sanctified in the name of the new civil religion: "When coming hither, please remove your shoes because you are standing on hallowed ground."<sup>76</sup>

Thus, due to its paltry ability to influence national commemoration policy, Shelach chose to direct its efforts to the municipal level. But success was minimal even here because the majority of local governments were controlled by Mapai. Only in Gush Dan (Israel's central region), where the liberal camp controlled a number of local councils, were its achievements noteworthy. A salient example was Tel Aviv. As early as November 1948, Shelach had demanded that "Jaffa's streets to be named after its hero-liberators" — declared the headline of an article, appearing in *Herut*. However, that same article goes on to relate that: "The blood of 35 Etzel fighters and infiltrators who fell in the [Arab] defense of Jaffa during Passover 1948...have been ignored by the authorities, who chose to name the streets with insensitive, inarticulate numbers."<sup>77</sup>

Just prior to Independence Day, 1950, the Municipality of Tel Aviv announced plans to name or rename 22 streets and roundabouts in honor of the War of Independence. The list was compiled of the following names: *Eilat*, *HaPalmach*, *Hagana*, *HaGibor* *HaAlmoni* (The Unknown Soldier), *Negba*, *Emek Ayalon*, *Gush Etziyyon*, *Shaar Hagai*, *Beer Sheva*, *Har Tziyyon*, *Har Tov*, *Mishmar HaYarden*,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> *Herut*, 9 November 1948. (Hebrew)



*Nahariya, Lod, HaNitzahon, HaLamed-Hei* (the 35 Palmach fighters killed on their way to Gush Etzion), *Tet-Zion* (for the 16 who fell at Ateret), the names of two fallen pilots, the Mahal Unit, *HaPortzim*, *David Marcus* and *Kikar HaKovshim* ("Conquerors' Square," referring to Etzel's occupation of Jaffa). "Kikar HaKovshim" was special because it was the only name that referred to a local rather than a national event, and the only one involving Etzel. Use of the term "conqueror" in the square's name was also unique because it implied adoption of Etzel's ideological lexicon: That is, some viewed the name as having ramifications going beyond a mere choice of words. To them it implied that the Tel Aviv Municipality, ruled by the liberal camp, had adopted Etzel's version of the Jaffa campaign. In the end, the word "kovshim" — conquerors — was used, but for a street rather than for the area's main public square.

This shift was meaningful. The street would be named after Jaffa's Etzel liberators, in their own terminology. Therein lies the name's uniqueness: Under Hagana influence, the rhetoric describing the War of Independence portrayed the campaign as a defensive war. The subjects of this rhetoric had freed settlements and territories; "defenders" and "liberators" were the dominant appellations circulating. Now a street was named using Etzel's more forthright and abrasive terminology.

In the flurry of commemorative activity, Shelach turned to Tel Aviv's Mayor with the suggestion of erecting a monument to Jaffa's liberators opposite the local mosque, *Hasan-Bek*. Shelach even expressed willingness to finance the project. The proposal was denied by Rokach, who explained his refusal in terms belonging to Ben Gurion's statist lexicon: "Commemoration cannot be divided according to organizational affiliation; it must be universal in character."<sup>78</sup> He had argued

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<sup>78</sup> *Report to Members. the Department for the Underground's Casualties*, undated but apparently written in September 1951. Jabotinsky Institute Archives. 737-45 (Hebrew)

elsewhere that "such commemorative plaques will be manufactured but they must be placed throughout our city only in accordance with the wishes of the Municipality...."<sup>79</sup>

Shelach had been forced to wait for Municipality initiatives while attempting to influence that policy. The first official proposal was formulated in April 1951. The Mayor of Tel Aviv had decided to erect three monuments to the memory of fallen from the War of Independence. One monument was universal in nature. Dedicated to all the residents of Tel Aviv who had died during the War, it was to be constructed on Malchai Yisrael Square, the future site of the municipality's main building; another at the former Tel Aviv-Jaffa city limits, in memory of the dead who had fallen in the Jaffa campaign; and the third in Independence Park on the Tel Aviv seashore, in homage to the pilots killed while defending the city. Rokach wrote to the Chief of the General Staff informing him about the competition to be held regarding construction of the three monuments. He also requested that a representative of the IDF sit on the judges committee.<sup>80</sup> The winner of this competition was Michael Karo, whose proposed monument to the memory of the Jaffa dead would eventually be erected in what was then called "Liberators' Park." The monument's facade would display the symbols of the Hagana and Etzel next to that of the Municipality of Tel Aviv.<sup>81</sup> Its cornerstone would be laid on Remembrance Day, 1957.

Shelach remained persistent in its goal of penetrating the message of Etzel's responsibility for the success of the Jaffa campaign into the collective consciousness. In March 1963, on the eve of Israel's fifteenth Independence Day, a committee was

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<sup>79</sup> Rokach, S. 13 August 1950, memorandum sent to the Department for the Underground's Casualties.

<sup>80</sup> Rokach, S. 23 April 1951, letter to Dori, Y., Chief of the General Staff, IDF Archives, 1559\52 - 67. (Hebrew)

<sup>81</sup> Azaryahu, 1993, *Between Two Cities, Katedra*, 68, p. 116. (Hebrew)

formed to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the liberation of Jaffa. The committee organized a string of observances for the same day, 11 April 1963, held in the Nachlat Yitzhak Cemetery, the Alliance High School, and at the corner of HaKovshim and Lotem Streets in Jaffa. "Immediately after the ceremony, we will unveil the commemorative plaques that were placed in proximity of the areas where the soldiers fell" was inscribed on the invitations sent to the victims' families.<sup>82</sup> Quite independently, Etzel veterans indeed placed a commemorative plaque on the Clock Tower in Jaffa. The plaque's text told their own version of the campaign and emphasized their responsibility for the city's surrender. Their place in the national narrative was thereby established within the physical environment of Tel Aviv: "Eternal glory to Etzel soldiers, the nation's heroes and liberators, who fell in the historic battle for the liberation of Jaffa. Victory was won with their blood...." Six similar brass plaques were mounted at sites where Etzel fighters had been killed. As opposed to the monument in Liberators' Park, these plaques retained their strict association with the underground organization and remained devoid of any official municipal seal.

A more prominent commemorative initiative, also promoted by Shelach, was rejected by the municipality. Shelach had requested the right to place a reproduction of the mortar used to shell Jaffa during the first four days of the operation at the head of Lutece Street in Jaffa.<sup>83</sup> Another rejected request involved broadcasting the ceremonies dedicating the commemorative plaques over national radio, during which

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<sup>82</sup> Letter of invitation sent from the Committee for the Celebration of the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Conquest of Jaffa to the martyrs' families, 13 March 1963, The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5\4 - 17. (Hebrew)

<sup>83</sup> Director of Shelach. Letter to Mordechai Namir, Mayor of Tel Aviv—Jaffa, 13 March 1963, The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5\4 - 17. (Hebrew)



eyewitness reports would be given. The official reason for the denial was that the broadcast schedule had already been finalized.<sup>84</sup>

Etzel's commemoration efforts throughout 1963 can be understood against the Municipality's decision, confirmed by the City Council, to rename Jaffa's Clock Square as "Hagana Square" during the Jaffa independence celebrations. Members of the Etzel Veterans Association convened a press conference and expressed the insult they felt as a result of the decision because, in their view, the initiative behind the Jaffa assault was strictly their own. Yitzhak Livni, Chairman of the Association and a former Etzel operations officer, decried the decision: "An attempt to pervert history, and the public's views, especially among those who have not yet touched Israel's shores." Shmuel Tamir even sent a letter on behalf of the Herut faction of the City Council to Tel Aviv's mayor, Mordechai Namir, threatening to petition the High Court of Justice to nullify the decision. In response to the threatened attempts by Etzel's bereaved families to disrupt the renaming ceremony, the municipality reversed its decision and postponed the celebrations. The renaming ceremony itself was cancelled.<sup>85</sup>

In the end, Etzel activists succeeded in preventing the change in the Clock Tower's name, and they also managed to place a commemorative plaque on the structure itself. A pamphlet issued by Shelach in connection with the plaque's dedication described Etzel's version of the events as follows:

...and what would have happened had we waited, as the Hagana demanded, until 15 May, the date slated for the evacuation of British forces?...The Hagana attempted to overtake Tel Arish but failed, to conquer Abu Kabir but failed...A miracle was about to visit our people once more. Our timely attack

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<sup>84</sup> Kenner, T., Assistant Director, the Israel Broadcasting Authority, 31 March 1963, letter to Shertzer. A., The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5\4 - 17. (Hebrew)

<sup>85</sup> *HaBoker*, 24 June 1963. (Hebrew)

on Jaffa, at the last moment, not only saved Tel Aviv...it saved the entire front...But we paid a heavy price for the conquest of Jaffa, 38 officers and men...the price might have been higher. Who can say whether the Altalena is part of the price we paid for Jaffa's independence, which raised the country's love for its rebels to new heights.<sup>86</sup>

On that same day in 1963, Shelach held its own official ceremony in Jaffa. This ceremony would become a ritual among members of Herut. The announcement published in honor of the event stated: "

The masses are only now beginning to appreciate the extent of the operation and its strategic importance in the general campaign. Appreciation will only grow over time. The units that participated in the assault on Jaffa will come to be called 'Tel Aviv's liberators,' and all the city's residents will prostrate themselves on the graves of our comrades who fell in this historic battle....<sup>87</sup>

Etzel's experience in Ramat Gan was different from that in Tel Aviv. There, attempts to plant a reminder of the underground's contribution to independence within the urban space went more smoothly. A case in point is the monument in memory of Dov Gruner and of the three Etzel members killed during the attack on the British police station located in Ramat Gan. (The wounded Gruner was arrested and eventually hanged.) With the consent of the Ramat Gan municipality, the statue was erected in 1954 opposite the very same stationhouse attacked by Etzel forces in 1946, now the home of the local police. The statue, sculpted by Hannah Orloff and cast in Paris in 1953, depicts an aged lion struggling with a cub. The lion motif was borrowed from the statue of the lion erected at Tel Hai. In the Gruner statue, the cub represents

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<sup>86</sup> Undated text, apparently a draft of a pamphlet, meant to be distributed in March 1963 by the Committee to Celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Liberation of Jaffa, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, π 5\4 - 1. (Hebrew)

<sup>87</sup> Announcement/Order of the Day, apparently dated 1963, The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/4-17. (Hebrew)

the Lion of Judah who does battle against the aging British lion. The larger British lion likewise represents the power of the British police, attacked by the cub, Etzel, in 1946. Shelach described the statue's connotations in the accompanying brochure: "The monument...will visually demonstrate the war of a minority against the majority, a war of the type waged by the underground against the foreign enslaver...." Like most local governments at the time, the Ramat Gan municipality was controlled by the liberal camp, one of Labor's main competitors below the national level. Prior to the decision to allocate land for the monument, the Herut faction sitting on the city council successfully exerted pressure on its Mayor. Shelach then organized a campaign to raise donations for the monument commemorating Gruner, one of the individuals who had come to symbolise the underground and its rebellion. The inscription on the statue reads as follows: "A monument to the soldiers belonging to the National Military Organization: Dov Gruner, hanged by the British, and three others who fell in the attack on the British police station on 25 April 1946." Another inscription, also incised on the statue's brick foundations, reads: "Nili, the glory of Israel will not lie or repent (First Samuel 15, 29), the first national underground resistance for independence. [sic]" This reference to Nili confirmed that organization's place in the historical ethos of the underground. A similar message was associated with the monument to the Ten Martyrs (Nili, Etzel and Lehi), erected by the Rishon LeTziyyon municipality in 1955. Contrary to its official status, the latter project was, in effect, a private initiative: the town's Mayor, Eitan Belkind, was the brother of Naaman Belkind, one of the Nili fallen.

Compared to the scope of official commemoration on the national level, these successes were highly local and negligible. As could be expected, when central and local bodies approached the subject of commemoration, they naturally searched the



official records, for the names of those killed while serving with Etzel or Lehi; none were to be found. Shelach received numerous letters from parents who had found that the names of their sons were missing from the public monuments, even when they had participated in battles fought against the Arabs.

The influence of these sources was likewise clearly visible in another type of commemoration project, the naming of Israel's streets. The process in Tel Aviv has already been described but from a different perspective. In Haifa, where the Hagana's victorious campaign involved Etzel's somewhat marginal participation, the city's new Mayor, Abba Hushi, immediately upon his election in 1951, convened a special committee on the subject of street names. His stated purpose was to Hebraize Haifa's street names. To this end, he turned to the Haifa branch of the Hagana Veterans Association in April of that year, and requested that it prepare a list of names that would "commemorate important sites in the campaign for the city's independence." The list came to include 41 names, all of them "Hagana services, units and battles."<sup>88</sup>

The process repeated itself throughout the country. In response, the director of Shelach, BenZion Katznellenbogen, when writing to Herut officials, commented:

I would like to draw your attention to the paucity of our cities' streets that carry the names of Etzel and Lehi operations or of the underground's heroes...It is needless to refer to the significant educational value of commemoration of the feats committed by the underground's heroes for the younger generation and new immigrants...With the renaming of the streets in Tel Aviv's new neighborhoods, but especially of Jaffa's streets, which are numbered, this urgent problem has again arisen on the [public] agenda, and you are requested to exercise all the influence at your disposal and to do so with alacrity....<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Memorandum from the Haifa Hagana Veterans Association to the Secretary of Haifa's City Council. 16 April 1951. Haifa Municipal Archives, File 209. (Hebrew)

<sup>89</sup> Katznellenbogen, B., 8 May 1956, letter to the Tel Aviv branch of Herut, The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 16/5 16-7. (Hebrew)

Others describe a different kind of discrimination: The graves of Etzel members were neglected while the graves authorized by the Ministry of Defense were well tended.<sup>90</sup> In Hadera, for instance, a commemorative plaque was installed "with the names of all the dead — Hadera's sons — who had fallen for the sake of the homeland." Yet, despite declared intentions of listing the names "without reference to their organizational affiliation," wrote Miriam Kellner, "my late son's name was not noted." Kellner's son had died during the Altalena incident. "My son Dov served his country as part of Etzel and was martyred for its [i.e., Israel's] sake on the Altalena armaments vessel. I find no justification in discriminating against his memory. I am thoroughly shocked by unreasoning hatred, especially because the [Yad Labanim] has ascribed to this virulent discrimination between citizens...I strongly request that the bias be corrected and that my son's name be added to the list of Hadera's heroes."<sup>91</sup>

Another case is that of Ramle. In a letter dated 30 March 1950 addressed to the Mayor of Ramle, regarding the first request made by the underground to allocate a memorial in memory of their fallen in Ramle, Shelach's Department for the Underground's Martyrs wrote: "We respectfully turn to you once again in the matter of placing a commemorative plaque in honor of the Etzel dead and missing in action who fell ...The bereaved families frequently request answers from us about the status of the request yet there is nothing we can relay."<sup>92</sup> Their request was to be fulfilled in 1992, 22 years later, in the form of a State memorial to all Etzel dead.

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<sup>90</sup> For the wealth of correspondence, see the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/17 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>91</sup> Kellner, M., 9 June 1957, Letter to Yad Labanim, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/17 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>92</sup> The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 7\37 - 42. (Hebrew)

The State's institutions were far from pleased with the appearance of private and municipal initiatives, however marginal in number, because little control could be exerted over the messages transmitted or their form. As early as 1949, the Ministry of Defense announced that: "It would be preferable to cease all activity and wait until the public institutions decide how and in what manner to commemorate these saints."<sup>93</sup> In effect, Shelach attempted to further commemoration of its fallen at sites independent of the official memory sites that embraced only Hagana and IDF fallen. Although the latter appear together in the *Yizkor* volumes (see Chapter Five) and lie side-by-side in military cemeteries, the sole place where Etzel and Lehi dead were commemorated and buried together was in a private institution, the *Achdut Yisrael* synagogue in Jerusalem.

In the absence of government sponsorship, the raising of commemorative projects faced many obstacles, financial and legal alike. Yonni Greenfeld, Chairman of Yad Labanim, refers to this issue in a letter written to Ben Gurion, informing him that bereaved families were erecting commemorative obelisks independently:

The deep spiritual need to commemorate the memory of their dear ones has unsettled them and become a life-or-death issue...They nevertheless began the project and stopped only when their funds were depleted. This is the source of their request that the Minister [of Defense] assist them so that they may conclude their mission.<sup>94</sup>

Alternatively, public participation in commemoration rituals was far from spontaneous. This applied to every avenue in which commemoration might materialize, including burial. For instance, until directives to the contrary were issued

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<sup>93</sup> Ministry of Defense, 21 June 1949, press release. (Hebrew)

<sup>94</sup> Shamir, 1996, p. 80.



from "the top," cemeteries where soldiers might be buried retained their status as private sites, physically neglected and forsaken, visited only rarely by relatives of the deceased. Numberless complaints concerning maintenance were forwarded by bereaved parents to the responsible institutions. One complaint, made in April 1950, concerned the lamentable condition of the Beit Keshet cemetery, where the son of Yitzhak Ben Zvi, then President of Israel, was also buried.<sup>95</sup> In response, Shaul Avigur joined their campaign and noted that the phenomenon "deeply worried" him.<sup>96</sup> Yet, despite efforts to attract the public to the State's commemorative rituals staged at the gravesites, attendance was poor and limited to bereaved families.<sup>97</sup> Similar reports were delivered to a meeting of the 1955 Independence Day Planning Committee, noting that the public attended such events only in communities located in the periphery.<sup>98</sup> The country's leadership was thus blatantly informed that they could not rely on the public's spontaneous participation.

Their realization that this was in fact the case prodded officials to find ways to expand public attendance through institutional manipulations. Hence, the Commemoration Unit turned to the Ministry of the Interior with a request that it ensure that the local authorities under its jurisdiction close their offices and enjoin their staffs to "go to the cemeteries and participate in the commemorative rituals conducted there."<sup>99</sup> Similarly, participation of schoolchildren was scheduled for the first time in 1955, during that year's Remembrance Day rituals.<sup>100</sup> One fact

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<sup>95</sup> Interim Committee for the Families of War of Independence Martyrs 21 April 1950, letter to Avigur, S. (Hebrew)

<sup>96</sup> Avigur, S., 24 April 1950, letter to Dekel, Y. (Hebrew)

<sup>97</sup> Yad Labanim, 1 March 1954. Protocol of meeting with Minister of Defense Pinchas Lavon. (Hebrew)

<sup>98</sup> Protocol, 16 January 1954, p. 6; *Protocols of the Public Council for Commemoration*, 27 May 1955, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Commemoration Unit, 13 April 1953, letter to the Minister of the Interior. (Hebrew)

<sup>100</sup> Independence Day Organizing Committee, 20 June 1955, *Protocol*, Meeting No. 12, Concluding Meeting, p. 2. (Hebrew)

contributing to the success of this move was that Remembrance Day is not treated as a holiday, meaning that school was in session; hence, the children could participate within the framework of their daily activities.

Apathy to commemoration of the War of Independence fallen did not go entirely unnoticed. E. Israel, a columnist for *Davar*, the Labor Movement organ, wrote a series of articles on the subject under the title "How the Nation Commemorates Its Martyrs":

Despite all the sincere and protracted attempts made by individuals, institutions, households, and the Commemoration Unit," he wrote, "these parties remain thoroughly bewildered by the question of why their voices remain unheard. To this very day, our three major cities have not erected a single monument in memory of their fallen sons. Hardly any streets have been named after individual dead, groups, or even the main battles where they died, especially when compared with the commemorative activities conducted with respect to the more distant past. Think of how we commemorate World War II dead, for instance. Yet today, not one major institution or place of work has done more than the bare minimum to commemorate its lost employees...Nor have any high schools — excluding Bilu, Gymnasia Herzliya, and Tichon Hadash — exerted any effort to even passively commemorate their students within their walls.<sup>101</sup>

The analytic response to this journalistic indictment is found by framing national commemoration in the context of symbolic politics. Monuments are recognized instruments for enhancement of national consciousness. As Mosse demonstrates in his study, monuments are iconographic as well as textual symbols that inculcate the myth of self-sacrifice and patriotism into the public sphere as in physical space. An outstanding instance of this process can be found in Germany. In the wake

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<sup>101</sup> Israel, E., 16 April 1953, *Davar: Weekly Supplement*. (Hebrew)

of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), numerous monuments were constructed to give iconographic expression to the myth of the German people and its power to vanquish its enemies. The majority of monuments represented fallen soldiers as patriots who had sacrificed their lives on the altar of nationalism.<sup>102</sup> Military cemeteries were thereby transformed into secular religious sites, temples for the practice of nationalistic rites.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, these sites prepared the public for legitimization of hegemonic politics. When the masses come to pay their respects and to honor national institutions, the dead resting in the military cemeteries and the groups identified with them were perceived as those who had sacrificed themselves for the national project. Commemoration vested the dead with new life, but in the public rather than the private sphere. Those who took no part in this project, or were perceived as foreign to it, were deprived of any substance in the conceptual fabric of daily life.<sup>104</sup>

Ben Gurion's response to the public's apathy regarding commemoration was "cultural engineering," manifested in legislation; he placed little trust in stygian emotions or mass-initiated acts. By fixing celebration of Remembrance Day in a series of commemorative rituals stipulated or supported by law, he hoped to induce the requisite political behavior: massive participation and social recognition of Labor's legitimacy, rooted in the immense price paid by bereaved families. This motive was reflected in the statement made on 18 June 1958 by Shmuel Dayan (MK, Labor), himself a bereaved father, when he raised Proposal 609, *Law: Remembrance Day in Honor of the Martyrs of the War of Independence* on his party's behalf:

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<sup>102</sup> Shamir, 1996, p. 10.

<sup>103</sup> Mosse, G. L., 1975, *The Nationalization of the Masses*. New York: publ., pp. 42-72.

<sup>104</sup> A related, interesting phenomenon is the transformation of the graves of Christian saints that were found in the cemeteries of late Imperial Roman and the Byzantine Empire. See Brown, P., 1981, *The Cult of the Saints*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



I propose, in the name of the Public Council for Commemoration, to legislate the law legalizing observance of Remembrance Day in honor of War of Independence dead. It is true that we already instituted a memorial day, but its observance is haphazard, piecemeal, and voluntary. In some villages, loved ones are honored by visits to the cemeteries where they are buried, but they are few in number. We should note that thousands of fathers, mothers, and orphans do not wait for Remembrance Day to honor their dear ones, they do so nightly and daily. And they are very much aggrieved. But in the cities, where the majority lives, Remembrance Day is not observed, especially in the cafes and theatres, where life goes merrily on as if nothing had happened. For this reason, we propose a law requiring public places of entertainment to be closed on Remembrance Day eve, so that during at least one day a year, everyone will be able to pay their respects to their war heroes. Therefore, we propose that...the law will be binding on the entire population.<sup>105</sup>

Ben Gurion embraced the idea from a highly centralist perspective; to him, only three military cemeteries were to be inaugurated, one each in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa.<sup>106</sup> His opinion did not, however, prevail. In September 1949, it was decided to build eight military cemeteries: in Jerusalem, Nachlat Yitzhak (Tel Aviv), Netanya, Kfar Warburg, Haifa, Nahariya, Afula, and Rosh Pina. An additional 25 "small, local burial plots" would also be established.<sup>107</sup> Had the cemeteries been more rigidly centralized, performance of standardized commemorative rituals would have been easier to exact. In reality, the distribution of burial sites made it possible for the rituals conducted to deviate from official formats: In 1954, the prescribed Remembrance Day rituals were conducted in only 14 cemeteries.

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<sup>105</sup> Dayan, S., 19 June 1958, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>106</sup> The Commemoration Unit, undated, internal working paper: *History of the Disagreements Regarding Commemoration of Soldiers*, p. 8. (Hebrew)

<sup>107</sup> Commemoration Unit, 1950, *Proposed Budget*, pp. 5-6. (Hebrew)

Still another route for centralized control over commemoration was utilized by the State: headstone inscriptions. Uniformity in the format of gravestone inscriptions is applied universally, and betrays more than formal-technical aspects. Headstone inscriptions make strong statements about the role played by the dead in national tradition, in the collective space. Military cemeteries belong to the public space; from this locus, myths, interpretations and the meaning of bereavement are constructed as military as well as civilian experiences. Uniformity in inscriptions was agreed to early on. According to this principle, cemeteries would express the view that "each and every one dedicated his or her life to one shared goal...uniformity must be achieved in a conspicuous and decisive way."<sup>108</sup>

Gravestone inscriptions, as artifacts belonging to the cultural apparatus, therefore reveal attitudes toward those buried in cemeteries and the function of the cemeteries themselves. The government statement published in *Davar*, reveals several aspects of its attitude:

The fathers and mothers who bequeathed us their sons as warriors and defenders of the national honor can be assured that the Jewish people will not forget those who volunteered to fight against the enemy...The War of Independence and establishment of the State have raised new problems that were previously unheeded. One of these problems, related to the War in the most tangible way, is that of commemoration of our fallen and, closely related, the construction of military cemeteries.<sup>109</sup>

That is, until independence, every aspect of security and warfare was considered strategically, tactically and operationally. After independence, state

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<sup>108</sup> Rosen, P., Minister of Justice, 20 March 1950, Session 128, the First Knesset, see *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>109</sup> The Commemoration Unit, Ministry of Defense, 24 July 1949, Introduction, Public Announcement: Competition: Design of Military Cemeteries. (Hebrew)

institutions were required to regulate the relationship between the state and the bereaved for the first time.

The debate over a durable solution to the issue of burial and the format of the cemeteries themselves began immediately upon the War's close. Prior to statehood, military dead were buried in civil cemeteries, sometimes in temporary plots located in small communities. So, in March 1949, the committee mandated to devise an orderly policy sat for the first time. The solutions they discussed ranged from the construction of civil cemeteries containing sections with plots for soldiers, to that of military cemeteries. In the end, the Ministry of Defense decided to establish military cemeteries.<sup>110</sup> The plans were all-inclusive, covering every detail, beginning from the location of the graves and their design. This task became the first attended to by the Commemoration Unit, which had begun preparing for its mission in October 1948: "The Unit will plan and implement the organizational, technical and aesthetic arrangements in accordance with Jewish tradition. These functions include: burial, setting a headstone at each dead soldier's grave, the placing of a general commemorative plaque, in each cemetery."<sup>111</sup> Hence, the Unit's mandate was to execute the detailed terms of the associated law, which would be passed in 1950 under the title *Law: Military Cemeteries*.

The Minister of Justice, Pinchas Rosen<sup>112</sup> proposed the law, while stating that it represented the nation's obligation to its bereaved families. An additional aim of the law was "to concentrate...the bodies in military cemeteries...which would permit proper care [of the graves], an honor due the fallen, and preservation of an agreeable

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<sup>110</sup> Summary of the Judges of the Competition for the Planning of Military Cemeteries, conducted during 14 March 1949; see Azaryahu, 1990, p. 171, fn. 27. (Hebrew)

<sup>111</sup> E. Z. Eshkoli, October 1948, working paper. (Hebrew)

<sup>112</sup> 20 March 1950.



atmosphere." Rosen also noted that these activities paralleled the efforts exerted to produce *Yizkor* (commemorative) volumes, another task assigned to the Commemoration Unit. According to Rosen, the names to appear in these books would be those of the soldiers buried in the designated military cemeteries.

The cemeteries' owner, its caretaker, and the master of ceremony of the rituals to take place there was, in effect, the State: "The proposed law contains an important provision...the right of possession to the land dedicated to military rituals will rest with the State. The law proposes that all the military cemeteries cited will be transferred to state ownership." Nationalization of bereavement would flourish with time, and become a major bone of contention between bereaved families and the responsible institutions. The ensuing debate would come to envelope the conflict between collectivist and liberal values regarding how loved ones should be buried and how they should be commemorated.<sup>113</sup>

Conceptually and practically, the main reason for wanting to concentrate the bodies of the dead in a limited number of cemeteries was that such a policy enabled appropriation of burial and commemoration from the arena of the family to that of the State. Private experiences could thereby become public experiences.<sup>114</sup> In order to nationalize bereavement and use it to further political goals, the state was to guarantee that the entire community of the dead be "in their hands." A reading of various Knesset debates indicates that in private cemeteries, those not owned by the State, official rituals were not held, crowds did not arrive to celebrate the Remembrance Days as intended, and the practices enacted did not transmit the desired messages.

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<sup>113</sup> Doron, G. and Lebel, U., 2000, The Defensive Organization: The Ministry of Defense Against Bereaved Parents, *Plilim*, 9, pp. 285-369. (Hebrew)

<sup>114</sup> Lebel, U., 1998. *The Political Behavior of Bereavement*. unpublished MA thesis. Tel Aviv University, Department of Political Science. (Hebrew)

Contrary to expectations, nationalization of bereavement did not take place without comment. Members of the left who shared Ben Gurion's collectivist views with respect to other issues objected to placing bereavement under the statist-Labor umbrella. Thus, during the same session that Rosen had proposed the *Military Cemeteries Law*, members of Mapam nayed the project. Yitzhak Bar Yehuda (MK, Mapai) commented tersely:

I assume that everyone knows that we are not afraid of nationalization in several areas of the economy. But I am absolutely stunned to hear that the only objects, or at least the first objects that you propose to nationalize are the bodies of our dead soldiers...According to this law, parents do not exist at all! If an individual serving in the army dies or falls in battle...his body will be appropriated by the state's representatives. Parents aren't mentioned even once in any of the law's articles. Everyone else you might imagine is mentioned: the Chief Medical Officer, and the Rabbinate, of course, but not bereaved parents!...Is this the proper way deal with such a delicate subject?<sup>115</sup>

In reply to these allegations, Ben Gurion claimed that nationalization of bereavement and memory provided the sole mechanism for the State to repay, as much as it could, bereaved parents for their sacrifices and to institutionalize the rites held in the military cemeteries. These spaces were meant to recognize the parents' loss, as would the other rituals soon to become part of mass culture. Ben Gurion himself came to use these occasions to applaud parents for their contribution to the State's rebirth and its development. To illustrate, during the 1950 Remembrance Day rituals, after *Yizkor*, the prayer for the dead, had been read, Ben Gurion stated: "...Above the images of the sweet boys and girls glows the images of their parents...the wondrous lions of Israel."

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<sup>115</sup> Bar Yehuda, Y. 20 March 1950, Session 128, the First Knesset, see *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

Military cemeteries were thus treated as statist projects that, like the plethora of other projects initiated by Mapai, were intended to express the general will, the narrative of Israel's rebirth and survival. Their target audience was the entire public. In addition to the *Yizkor* volumes (see Chapter Five), military cemeteries would come to mirror the community of the dead, the contributors to the independence project. Those included were signified as members of the group to which the young state owed its resurrection. Burial in a military cemetery became one of the passkeys to social acceptance, status, and material rewards. Inclusion in or exclusion from this select community, again based on decisions regarding the right to a military burial, acquired political nuances almost from the start.

The terms of admission into this community were elaborated during the parliamentary debates held surrounding the *Law: Families of Soldiers Killed in the War (1950)*. In the pithy phrases of Minister of Justice Rosen: "The military cemeteries express the principle that all those who fell during the War were comrades with a single objective — this invites uniformity." In this context, uniformity meant participation in an exclusive community. This principle was firmly put into practice. Headstones displaying the IDF seal and their location in military cemeteries marked their subjects as participants in that community. Those buried outside the cemetery's perimeter, or close by but devoid of headstones bearing an official seal were marked as non-participants. To complete the cycle of signification, the task of gathering the bodies, their interment, the placement of the headstones and their inscriptions, as well as maintenance of the grounds was assigned to state — not private — agencies, primarily the Commemoration Unit.

A journalist in the popular press fixed the new site's identity in the title of his article: "Military Cemeteries — Pantheons to Heroism." In the article, the author



expresses his amazement at the State, which had "invested hundreds of thousands of [Israeli] pounds in the construction of the military cemeteries that at some future date will become national pantheons to Israeli bravery."<sup>116</sup> As pantheons, Israel's military cemeteries not only accelerated the transmission of ideological and political messages outward, from the family of the bereaved to the rest of the nation, they also functioned as sites for socialization of the community it represented, the same family of the bereaved.<sup>117</sup> That is, these sites were converted into collective spaces, arenas used by the State for labeling members of the in-group, the elite, and for transmitting the pertinent social messages, reinforced through annual repetition of the state rituals enacted there.

It was Izhar Harari, a Progressive Party (liberal camp) member of the Knesset who verbalized the spatial dimension attached to the symbolic marking of this community:

Perhaps we should allow the Ministry of Defense the opportunity to occasionally expand the law's boundaries...I know of cases where soldiers died during training with the underground, under conditions requiring that they be buried on the spot in order to prevent the British from discovering the incident. Even when the family requested that the body be moved, it was often necessary to leave the body where it was for fear of revealing other activities. Perhaps the time has come to collect the remains of these fallen, which are few in number, and to bury them in a military cemetery; after all, the cause of their deaths is not very different from that which brought on the deaths of those who fell during the War of Independence."

To Harari, determination of burial criteria was in the State's purview, and should involve application of a uniform, universalistic policy. His remarks were

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<sup>116</sup> A. Talmi, *Davar*, 30 April 1952. (Hebrew)

<sup>117</sup> Naveh, 1993, pp. 159-160.

therefore seen to support Ben Gurion's demands to nationalize bereavement and to subordinate bereavement to laws that transfer discretion in these matters from the family to the state:

We should install special cemeteries dedicated to all those who died during the War of Independence. The cemeteries should be standardized, whose special character would be maintained and cared for by the state...If soldiers fought together, they should lie together in their final resting place. This should not prevent us from consulting the family...[but] I believe that the final decision should rest with the Minister of Defense.

Harari's approach even touched upon the design of these cemeteries and the graves themselves. A model was at hand, available for adoption or rejection: Following World War I, the British had established cemeteries in Palestine dedicated to the servicemen killed in the campaign to conquer the Turkish-held territory. The guiding principle was western in the basic equality attributed to the dead, expressed in the uniformity of its graves and symbols. The ruling perspective was that "military cemeteries were to be rooted in the idea of homogeneity, that everyone had dedicated their lives to a common purpose...The uniformity should be unmistakable and absolute." For their own reasons, representatives of the right joined Harari who, as a staunch liberal, had suggested expanding the boundaries of the community entitled to rest in the military cemeteries.

A good number of Mapai representatives sitting in the Knesset surprisingly agreed to the proposal to broaden eligibility for interment in the military cemeteries, although their sights were not set on Etzel or Lehi dead. They had others in mind, fighters who might be excluded due to strict obedience to the law's stipulations. Chaim Ben Asher (MK, Mapai), declared that:

I feel I must focus on one specific point...the matter of returning volunteers who fought in World War II for traditional Jewish burial on Israeli soil...This entails the retroactive acknowledgement of these volunteers as members of our country's army, which implies a gradual change in the definition of the term 'soldier' for the law's purposes...We should work to obtain recognition of volunteers as participants in our pre-independence armed forces."

With creation of the Public Council for Commemoration, a Knesset subcommittee was also created, mandated to determine what would be engraved on the headstones.<sup>118</sup> Shortly before Remembrance Day in early April 1951, the subcommittee announced that a format had been devised. Its content included the soldier's name, rank, serial number, parents' names, date of birth and of death according to the Hebrew calendar, in addition to the IDF seal. The Public Council had hoped to secure control over use of the IDF seal through a regulation entitling the Council alone to place headstones displaying the IDF seal.<sup>119</sup> In response, the Chief Counsel of the Ministry of Defense informed them that such a regulation could not be issued separately from new legislation.<sup>120</sup>

The IDF seal that appears on the headstones of recognized military casualties is more than decorative. It is a highly significant symbol that awards official and social status to its bearers. Such a symbolic process could be adopted because within the context of Israel's political culture, the IDF has come to be perceived as a fitting reflection of the values dominating the Israeli space. Israeli society, which has upheld collectivism as one of its constitutive ideological-organizational concepts since the

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<sup>118</sup> Subcommittee to Determine the Inscriptions on the Permanent Headstones of War of Independence Martyrs, 28 February 1951, meeting protocol, IDF Archives, unnumbered; Azaryahu, 1990, p. 183 fn. 67.

<sup>119</sup> Dekel, Y., 11 March 1951, letter to the Chief Counsel, the Ministry of Defense, cited in Azaryahu, 1990, p. 184, fn. 69.

<sup>120</sup> Knecht, M., 12 April 1951, letter to Dekel, Y., cited in Azaryahu, 1990, p. 184, fn. 69.



days of the Yishuv,<sup>121</sup> converted the military into an organ embodying these notions in all their ramifications.<sup>122</sup> The IDF seal that appeared on the graves of those who had died, in whatever framework, while defending the State represented an imprimatur of the successful acquisition of Israeli citizenship.<sup>123</sup> As a result, when groups other than those specified in the relevant laws, especially the *Law: Families of Soldiers Killed in the War (1950)* dared to use the IDF seal in the design of headstones for their own dead, the authorities were infuriated. This was so despite the fact that the “outsiders” had been comrades in arms with the Hagana and the IDF on various occasions. In a letter dated 23 June 1953, sent to the Legal Counsel of the Ministry of Defense, the Director of the Commemoration Unit, Yosef Dekel, wrote the following under the heading “The IDF seal as it appears on commemorative statutes and monuments”:

As I have already explained to you, a rule is needed that will forbid the use of the IDF seal in the absence of special permission given by the responsible officer. During my recent tour of military cemeteries...I noticed numerous instances where the IDF seal was placed on civilian as well as on military headstones....<sup>124</sup>

This preoccupation with the IDF seal illustrates the point. Nationalization of bereavement had political as well as socio-cultural dimensions. Its aim went beyond construction of a national ethos and collective culture. Permission to use the IDF seal became a potent tool in the hands of policy makers as it enabled the political elite to

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<sup>121</sup> To better comprehend the concept collectivism, we can refer to Meyer's definition: "A person fulfills his destiny only when he serves society." See Meyer, A., 1965, *The Soviet Political System*. New York: Random House.

<sup>122</sup> Lebel, U., 2002, The Politics of Commemoration, In D. Korn (ed.), *Public Policy and Administration in Israel*. Baltimore: Lexington.

<sup>123</sup> To this very day, during the conduct of the public and political debates about the involvement of Israel's ultra-Orthodox citizens in daily life, the question is raised of who will be laid to rest in a military cemetery.

<sup>124</sup> IDF Archives, 90\72 - 156. (Hebrew)

signify with the utmost efficiency who would be included and who excluded from this select community.

Construction of military cemeteries proceeded with alacrity and full support of the public administration. "I have read the report on the care of the graves of IDF dead and totally support you" wrote Ben Gurion to Dekel. "The plans should be executed with all speed, until not one grave is left without appropriate markings or proper form, even temporarily. We owe it not only to those who gave their lives for our freedom and to their parents, but also as a sign of respect for the Israel Defense Forces."<sup>125</sup> In practice, however, the graves belonging to the underground movements' dead were left unattended, with no markings or appropriate arrangements. For instance, in the Nachlat Yitzhak cemetery, next to the graves of Hagana fallen, Shelach's Department for the Underground's Martyrs observed that the "graves of Altalena martyrs lying in the military portion received no military seal. They appear to find it difficult to place a military seal on the grave of Avraham Stavksy and the others who they murdered...If they do not put headstones on the graves of the Altalena martyrs we will do so against their will...."<sup>126</sup>

In January 1956, after the Ministry of Defense continued to refuse to place headstones at the graves of the Altalena dead, Shelach's Director, B. Katznellenbogen notified the Commemoration Unit that "due to the lack of response to our request regarding placement of headstones at the graves of the casualties from the Altalena munitions carrier, we wish to inform you that we have ordered 16 headstones, which

<sup>125</sup> Ben Gurion, D., 29 June 1949, letter to Dekel, Y., cited in Azaryahu, 1990, p. 164. (Hebrew)

<sup>126</sup> Shelach, *Report of the Department for the Underground's Martyrs*, undated, probably September 1951, The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 37/7 - 42. (Hebrew)

we will place in the military portion of the Nachlat Yitzhak cemetery."<sup>127</sup> M. Orbach, Dekel's successor, hastened to warn Shelach that "no seal is to be incised on the headstones, and that the place of their deaths is to be noted as 'died on the Altalena munitions carrier.'"<sup>128</sup> These directions denied recognition of the headstones as legitimate features of military graves. This conclusion is supported by an internal memorandum dated May 1956 and classified as "top secret." The memorandum contains a summary of a meeting held with the Minister of Defense, on 24 May 1956: "The Ministry of Defense will not provide headstones for the graves of Altalena dead and orders that they be interred outside the military portion of the Nachlat Yitzhak cemetery."<sup>129</sup>

On 24 May 1956, the unveiling of the headstones at the graves of the 16 Altalena fallen took place at the Nachlat Yitzhak cemetery. The date was auspicious: It represented the eighth anniversary of the attack on the vessel. No representatives of any State institutions attended. B. Katznellenbogen, Director of Shelach, wrote the following to one of the bereaved families:

We are honored to send you a modest memento — two photographs taken at the unveiling ceremony of the headstone standing at the grave of your son — our dear comrade — conducted on 24 May 1956. We firmly believe that the efforts and sacrifices of Etzel's soldiers — heroes of the Altalena incident — will soon be recognized by the entire nation."<sup>130</sup>

Statist symbols did not appear solely in connection with military burial or IDF cemeteries. Ben Gurion sought a symbol that would more quickly and effectively link

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<sup>127</sup> Katznellenbogen, B., 26 January 1956, letter to Orbach, M., the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, - 167 5/16. (Hebrew)

<sup>128</sup> Orbach, M., 28 February 1956, letter to Katznellenbogen, B., the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, - 167 5/16. (Hebrew)

<sup>129</sup> Unsigned, cited in A. Ben Yosef, A., 27 May 1956, letter to Amir, Y., Head, the Personnel Division, IDF, the IDF Archives, 285-74/20. (Hebrew)

<sup>130</sup> Katznellenbogen, B., 5 June 1956, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/16 - 167. (Hebrew)



the national ethos with that community of the dead that he believed to have expressed the spirit of the times. In mid 1949, Dekel turned to the Jewish National Fund with a request to allocate "about 40-50 dunams" of its holdings in the vicinity of Jerusalem for use as a military cemetery. After review of several alternatives, it was decided that "the most appropriate area was the section of the hill meant to be used for Herzl's Tomb...According to the caretakers, the area is sufficient for the planned tomb in addition to a military cemetery."<sup>131</sup> Preparation of the site for its new function required laying of an access road half a kilometer in length, construction of terraces and placement of graves, at an estimated cost of £IL 15,000.<sup>132</sup> From the size of the budget, one can readily conclude that the cemetery would have a special function: "In the near future, the cemetery in Jerusalem, located on Mount Herzl, will operate as the IDF's main burial grounds. It appears that the bodies of all those buried abroad, who comply with the stipulations of the special decisions reached, will be transferred to Israel. Headstones will be placed for each soldier missing in action, as well as for the paratroopers buried in foreign territory."<sup>133</sup>

The image of Herzl, the prophet of the Zionist dream, was therefore chosen as the official symbol of the community of the dead. Construction of the cemetery and the tomb began in 1951, immediately following that year's Remembrance Day rituals, as stipulated in the associated law. However, due to the low level of spontaneous recognition of the symbol and its association with the dead, the political leadership requested that a grandiose public ceremony be held at the site, accompanied by the appropriate solemnity. Now, a year after the first Independence Day had been

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<sup>131</sup> Dekel, Y., 1 July 1949, Letter to A. Peri, the Ministry of Defense, the IDF Archives, unnumbered. (Hebrew)

<sup>132</sup> Proposed budget for 1950 as prepared by the Commemoration Unit, 9 September 1949, transmitted to A. Peri, Director General, the Ministry of Defense. (Hebrew)

<sup>133</sup> Cited from the Proposed Budget for 1950 prepared by the Commemoration Unit, see Azaryahu, 1995, p. 178. (Hebrew)

celebrated, the site would be dedicated together with Herzl's tomb. So, in summer 1951, Herzl's casket was interred in a state funeral conducted on the eastern heights of Jerusalem. The site was named "Mount Herzl" as an "expression of the respect and esteem felt toward Benjamin Zeev Herzl by the Israeli people."<sup>134</sup>

Mount Herzl was indeed intended to become Israel's national pantheon, where the nation's prophet and his disciples were to be buried in what eventually would be called the "Founding Fathers Plot" (*Chelkat Gedolei Ha'ouma*). As Chaim Bar Asher (MK, Mapai) would note in a different context: "Not just anyone can enter the national pantheon."<sup>135</sup> According to Azaryahu, Mount Herzl was to replace the Temple in Jerusalem as the center of Israel's civil religion.<sup>136</sup>

For the fallen, Mount Herzl would come to fill a role similar to that of the *Yizkor* volumes, discussed in the next chapter, a corpus that identified "who's in" and "who's out" vis-à-vis the national-statist ethos: "... on one hilltop we intend to locate the tomb of the originator of the Zionist dream and a cemetery for those who realized that dream," wrote Dekel.<sup>137</sup> The symbolic relationship was established during Defense Forces Day, celebrated in 1949, on the anniversary of Herzl's death. On that occasion, Ben Gurion would assert that this relationship linked the dreamer to the implementer. The site therefore supported Ben Gurion's efforts to identify national symbols with Mapai, which he hoped to present as the very incarnation of statism. The statist project was thus linked to the name of Herzl, the spiritual father of the nation. "Today marks the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the prophet of the Jewish state," declared Ben Gurion during his speech on that first Defense Forces Day:

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<sup>134</sup> Taken from the specifications of the site's architectural design competition, p. 2 (Hebrew)

<sup>135</sup> Debate over the *Netzer Sereni Law*, 3 January 1955, first roll call vote, *Knesset Protocols*, (Hebrew)

<sup>136</sup> Israel Staddis, cited in Azaryahu.

<sup>137</sup> Dekel, Y., 1 July 1949, letter to Peri, A., Director General, the Ministry of Defense. (Hebrew)



but this is no day for mourning or lamentation but of exaltation and thanksgiving, of victory and self-fortification, for our vision has been realized. The mortal Herzl is no more, but replaced by an immortal soul. His spirit floats above a reborn state of Israel, above its builders and defenders. Henceforth, 30 Tamuz will be celebrated as the Prophet's holiday — Herzl's day — as well as the holiday of his instruments — Defense Forces Day.<sup>138</sup>

Actually, war dead had been interred on Mount Herzl since the closing days of 1949, specifically, the bodies of 300 Hagana and IDF soldiers and officers had been lain to rest in November of that year with impressive ceremony. During the mass funeral, work ceased in Jerusalem as 50,000 residents, including teachers and their pupils, awaited the funeral cortege along its route.<sup>139</sup> Interment of another 600 dead was planned for 1950.<sup>140</sup> It was also decided to place a monument to soldiers buried on foreign soil at the site.

Eventually, Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir, responsible for the *Yizkor* project suggested that a "Heroes Shrine" be constructed on Mount Herzl. She hoped that the shrine would "house all the rich material that has been gathered in memory of the dead, produced in an appropriate manner, so that each volume would be dedicated to a single individual."<sup>141</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir assigned a museumized, historical meaning to the space, which would preserve the memory of those who had died so that the State could be reborn:

We intend to bequeath a complete and comprehensive record of their lives...They, who by their deaths, gave life to us and to our people. We have an obligation to them to inform the coming generations about who they

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<sup>138</sup> Ben Gurion, D., 1949, Defense Forces Day file, Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>139</sup> Davar, 20 November 1950.

<sup>140</sup> Proposed Budget for 1950 prepared by the Commemoration Unit, see Azaryahu, 1995, p. 178.

<sup>141</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, 23 March 1950, letter to Lotte Fuld, the IDF Archives, 758\1913\262. (Hebrew)



were...The shrine to be built will be a richly endowed monument, a place of study and communion with their memories.<sup>142</sup>

Pinkerfeld-Amir directed the proposal to the Prime Minister, Ben Gurion, who accepted it in principle. Upon receiving his decision, Pinkerfeld-Amir turned to architects and the Jewish Agency to advance her plan.<sup>143</sup> The proposal met the demands of those bereaved parents who had participated in the establishment of Yad Labanim the previous year. According to the proposal, a "Heroes Shrine" would be constructed in each of the three major cities (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa). There, all the material that could be gathered on the lives and character of the fallen would be concentrated. After receiving Ben Gurion's approval in 1950, the intention to build the shrines was advertised in the daily press. Yosef Dekel suggested, in turn, that the Shrine be built as a national institution, in which documents pertaining to acts of Jewish bravery from the entire period of Jewish national renaissance, including the period of the Shomer and the Hagana would be concentrated.<sup>144</sup> In the end, the project was not undertaken due to the massive funds required.

The special status of Mount Herzl rests in the symbolic function it fulfils as the national pantheon. For this reason, soldiers who fell before establishment of the State, such as the 25 Yordei HaSira, or those who fought in the Jewish Brigade during World War II, 155 were likewise honored.<sup>145</sup> In 1957, a "Commemoration Lane" was dedicated to the War of Independence dead who were buried on the Mount of Olives. A unique feature of the lane is that the commemorative plaques placed along its

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<sup>142</sup> Pinkerfeld Amir, A., 12 March 1950, letter to Julis, E., a bereaved brother, the IDF Archives, 758\1913\262. (Hebrew).

<sup>143</sup> Pinkerfeld Amir, A., 7 March 1950, letter to Dr. Lauterbach of the Jewish Agency, the IDF Archives, 758\1913\262. (Hebrew)

<sup>144</sup> Dekel, Y., 12 January 1954, Memorandum to the Ministry of Defense, IDF Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>145</sup> *Davar*, 30 April 1952. (Hebrew)

perimeter list the names and identifying details of all the fallen in the very same format as these items appear on their headstones.<sup>146</sup>

From the perspective of the State, Mount Herzl became the focal cemetery. A preponderance of resources and attention were channeled toward it, a fact that often irritated bereaved parents who were forced to wait until preparation of other military cemeteries could be concluded.<sup>147</sup> The proximity of the cemetery to the tomb of the founder of modern Zionism as well as to the graves of the Zionist Movement's and the nation's leaders endowed the site with a special aura. The process thus produced one of the main texts of Israel's founding myths, and fixed that text within the landscape. Mount Herzl thus expressed the national consensus with respect to the place of the War of Independence within the nation's heroic tradition. As a mirror of that consensus, any monument raised there, whether public or private, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, would reflect the attitudes prevailing at the time. Although these attitudes would change with the ruling political constellation, in the 1950s, Etzel and Lehi dead were still denied a final resting place on Mount Herzl.

Following internal Ministry of Defense consultations, which took place on 14 March 1949 between Dekel and Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir, it was determined that for the purpose of commemoration, "all those who fell while serving in the Hagana or on one of its missions as of 29 November 1947" would be included in the project. Later, in a letter dated 23 May 1949 sent to Shaul Avigur, Dekel would request that the President or the Prime Minister declare that all those killed in action against the enemy "in operations that did not contradict the positions taken by the authorized institutions,

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<sup>146</sup> *BaMachaneh*, 55, 4 September 1957, p. 8. (Hebrew)

<sup>147</sup> See for example minutes of the meeting between representatives of the Yad Labanim and the Minister of Defense Y. Lavon, 1 March 1954, p. 1, cited in Azaryahu, 1995, p. 181, fn. 59. (Hebrew)

starting from 1 December 1947, would be considered [IDF] servicemen." He hoped that such a declaration would remove all doubt about the status of Etzel and Lehi dead who had acted in contradiction to the "position taken by the authorized institutions," meaning Mapai-controlled organizations. Surprisingly, it was Ben Gurion who objected to a strict date, arguing that it was impractical.<sup>148</sup>

The issue was once more raised for discussion in connection with the condolence letters that Ben Gurion planned to send to the families of the fallen to be buried in military cemeteries. At the time, Ben Gurion explicitly stated that he would sign letters to Etzel and Lehi families "only in those cases that it becomes clear, after uncompromising, painstaking investigation that they really died while on duty in the war against the Arabs."<sup>149</sup> Several years later, Mordechai Orbach, as Director of the Commemoration Unit, would inform Shelach that:

...we have received numerous requests to transfer the remains of members of the Hagana and other organizations who were killed prior to 20 November, including cases such as yours. Please note that they do not comply with the conditions allowing burial in military cemeteries...We [therefore] cannot transfer their bodies to the military cemeteries.<sup>150</sup>

The decision's intent is clear: Ben Gurion refused to allow the story of the rebellion against the British any place within Israel's collective memory, including a place among the military dead. In a later version of the decision appearing in the February 1951 edition of the *Reshumot*, the government gazette in which new regulations and laws are published, the binding definition of military service is given as "service in the Hagana or any other planned operation against the Arab bands and

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<sup>148</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 29 May 1949, letter to Avigur, S., IDF Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>149</sup> Ben Gurion, D., cited in Ironi, Y., 9 January 1950, letter to Dekel, Y., IDF Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>150</sup> Orbach, M., 4 June 1955, letter to Shelach, the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/15 - 167. (Hebrew)



invading armies from 30 November 1947 to 31 December 1948." In effect, this definition states that only IDF and Hagana dead were eligible for the State's patronage.

The graves of Etzel and Lehi dead were thus officially ignored. Once again, Shelach took upon itself performance of all tasks otherwise assigned to the Public Council for Commemoration with respect to the treatment of its fallen. Shelach's Department for the Underground's Martyrs, described itself as "tending the graves of Etzel fighters located in 18 cemeteries throughout Israel; it has placed headstones on their graves." It is interesting to note that Shelach adopted the same rules legally required of the Public Council for Commemoration: concentration of graves in military cemeteries, uniformity in headstone inscriptions and headstone design, with the latter resembling the official version; and the Etzel seal, patterned after the IDF seal, place on the headstone. Other features were also copied, such as the preparation of special access roads leading to the graves and the regular performance of rituals for communing with the memories of the dead:

The Etzel seal, smote in bronze, was placed on the uniformly designed headstones. Safed's ancient cemetery, where the hanged are buried, lies at the lower reaches of the hill. The approach to the graves was extremely difficult. A paved road, with steps permitting easy access to the graves, was completed on 20 December 1953.<sup>151</sup>

In addition to the transfer of their bodies from numerous plots throughout the country and their burial in central locations, Shelach also took it upon itself to bring the bodies of dead who had died abroad for interment in Israel:

During the previous year, the Department managed, after much effort, to retrieve from their graves in Italy the remains of Israel Epstein, leader of the

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<sup>151</sup> Shelach, 1950, *Summary Report, 15 April 1949 to 31 October 1950*, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 71\12 - 16. (Hebrew)

Aviel squadron, who had died while trying to escape from prison in Rome. With the arrival of his body, an exhibition was dedicated to him at the Jabotinsky Institute; masses from the National Movement accompanied his funeral. The Department is also assisting in the transfer to Israel of the bodies of our Eritrean dead: Naftali Lubintchik, Shaul Galili, and Eliyahu Ezra, as well as in arranging for their funerals. The Department is also making every effort to return David Raziël's body from Iraq, but fulfillment of this goal is dependent on other, external factors.<sup>152</sup>

Many of the fallen from the war against the Arabs were thus excluded from admission into the designated community of the dead, especially if they were associated with the underground. Even after lengthy legal battles (see Chapter Five) had confirmed that the underground's dead were entitled to be considered IDF dead — that is, they had died while fighting the Arabs in operations approved by the official institutions — the responsible agencies did little to amend the situation. "We were shocked to hear of their refusal to erect a monument to the Dir Yassin dead...who...were excluded from the *Yizkor* volume that has just be published. We do not want to believe that this was an act of malice, but a misunderstanding...." wrote the head of Herut's Division for Rehabilitation of Members of the Underground to his peer in the Commemoration Unit. Only after the Courts had decided against the Ministry of Defense decision to prevent these fallen soldiers from enjoying the same survivors' benefits given to their comrades in the Hagana were their bodies transferred, in a military ceremony, from their temporary graves to interment on Mount Herzl.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> *Decision*, 24 May 1953, the Tel Aviv District Court, Case Nos. 56/51, 96/51, 90/51, and 92/51. (Hebrew)

The legal proceedings were not addressed against the policy per se, expressed in the definition of official war dead, but against what the Courts considered to be faulty implementation of that policy. But again, even in the wake of the trial and the burial of the Etzel and Lehi dead on Mount Herzl, delay characterized official actions, such as the lethargic placing of headstones bearing the IDF seal at the respective graves.<sup>154</sup> In February 1956, in response to the ruling and Shelach's repeated demands, the Director of the Commemoration Unit wrote that:

...the Ministry of Defense has agreed to place headstones at the graves of the five Dir Yassin dead located in the military cemetery on Mount Herzl. The headstones will follow the pattern of the other military headstones, and display identical inscriptions but not the IDF seal. The IDF seal can be incised only on the headstones of fallen who had received a military serial number."<sup>155</sup>

The objective now before Herut was to retroactively construct the military status of its soldiers in order to qualify them for the official IDF seal. This meant retroactive enlistment in the IDF. In his letter of 26 January 1956 to Major Uri Vrum, the head of the IDF's Personnel Division, Katznellenbogen wrote that:

The five Dir Yassin dead have not been [formally] enlisted by you to this very day. The problem arose when the Ministry of Defense Commemoration Unit informed us that they are unwilling to place the IDF seal on these graves...because this seal can be incised only on the headstones displaying a military serial number...we therefore demand that you complete the enlistment procedure and inform the Ministry of Defense of that fact.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> This attitude was extended to Shelach's request to reissue a *Yizkor* volume that would incorporate the names of the underground's martyrs. See Katznellenbogen, B., 23 January 1956, letter to the Commemoration Unit, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, unnumbered. (Hebrew).

<sup>155</sup> Orbach, M., 15 February 1956, letter to B. Katznellenbogen, private correspondence held by B. Katznellenbogen. (Hebrew)

<sup>156</sup> Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 16/5 - 167. (Hebrew)



To substantiate his demand, Katznellenbogen repeated the details of the Baranes case (1953), in which the court ruled that the Dir Yassin operation had been declared an operation approved by the Minister of Defense, which entitled the bereaved families of the Etzel and Lehi soldiers to compensation.

In the course of this parrying, copies of Katznellenbogen's request would be sent to Moshe Dayan, Chief of the General Staff, to Shimon Peres, Director General of the Ministry of Defense, and to Chaim Landau (MK, Herut), a member of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. To Katznellenbogen's surprise, he received no response from any of the addressees, even after a month:

sufficient time to compose a response...your behavior in this matter is reprehensible...if I do not receive some comment as to your decision about this matter within the next few days, I will have no other recourse but to turn to the High Court of Justice, where the legitimacy of our demands will come to light...such a step...will place the military institutions in a position in which they will appear as negating the memory of the nation's heroes and liberators. Such an attitude is unbecoming to the IDF and its institutions, whose reputation we all are interested in upholding.<sup>157</sup>

Peres eventually replied, advising Katznellenbogen that "the Minister of Defense has decided to enlist the Dir Yassin dead; hence, the IDF seal will be incised on their headstones."<sup>158</sup> The political aspects of this tarrying was not, however, lost on Herut's members; they consequently protested against it: "...we view this procrastination...as a deliberate slight to the memories of the nation's heroes, and an

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<sup>157</sup> Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/16 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>158</sup> Peres, S.. 8 April 1956, Letter to Katznellenbogen, B.. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/16 - 167. (Hebrew)

affront to the feelings of their bereaved families and to all those who hold their memories dear.”<sup>159</sup>

Ministry of Defense sources would not only resist the appearance of the IDF seal on Lehi and Etzel headstones, they would also not approve the appearance of the Etzel seal beside that of the IDF seal.<sup>160</sup> Thus, it fell upon Lehi, in addition to Herut, to attend to the issue of the headstones to be placed on their members' graves. Numerous letters from bereaved parents expressing their wonder that no headstones had been placed at their sons' graves were sent to Lehi offices as well. Many questions were raised in these letters: "We hope that the headstones will be ready by Remembrance Day. Will one of you attend the headstone's unveiling. It would be worthwhile advertising the date of the commemoration ritual so that his friends will be able to come."<sup>161</sup> The parents of Lehi fallen, after observing the commemoration rituals for Etzel and Hagana fallen, attended by a large audience, especially public figures, hoped that such participation would be repeated in their case.

The case of the Dir Yassin dead and the efforts that had led to their ultimate inclusion in the community signified by the IDF seal indicates much about the meanings attributed to the attempt to deny them this distinction. First, these efforts were based on principle, which only judicial intervention could resolve. Second, from the standpoint of Herut, the effort to include Etzel dead in the official community of the dead was symbolic in character: Even after the bereaved families were recognized as eligible to enjoy the same rights as their Hagana counterparts, Shelach refused to desist in its attempt to arrange for headstones similar to those of Hagana dead.

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<sup>159</sup> Katznellenbogen, B., 10 April 1956, letter to Shimon Peres, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5/16 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>160</sup> Shelach, October 1956, *Annual Report: Shelach, the Organization and its Activities, 1955-1956*, p. 6, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1/12 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>161</sup> Dvir, B., letter, Beit Yair Archives, file nos. 37-38-39. (Hebrew)

Although the underground's dead were transferred to the military cemetery on Mount Herzl, their symbolic and political recognition — epitomized by the IDF seal — was delayed, again until judicial intervention put an end to Ministry of Defense policy. In closing this chapter of the confrontation between the two camps, Katznellenbogen's comments, forwarded to the Commemoration Unit are highly revealing: "...We are confident that you will recognize the injustice perpetrated to the bereaved families and to the memory of their heroic sons for certain reasons that have no basis in the law that supposedly justified these action ."

These events articulate how Mapai managed its campaign of symbolic politics. These did not involve economic benefits or any of the other rights awarded to bereaved families per se. It did involve eligibility as a symbolic process conducted along channels of social communication. The official IDF seal incised on headstones was simply its tangible form. Contrary to a family's rights to benefits, such as tax deductions or financial assistance, issues that belong to the private sphere, a monument erected in full view at a public site — in this case, in military cemeteries — qualified the dead soldier for mention in the commemorative literature published by the Ministry of Defense. Commemorative literature a highly effectively vehicle for transmitting social and political messages to the masses. This effectiveness was reinforced through the official rituals and commemorative services held at the burial sites. Accordingly, the battle of Etzel and Lehi veterans waged for recognition of their dead was symbolic and political in the main. For this reason, even though the eligibility of the bereaved families of Dir Yassin dead and similar events for compensation and burial in a military cemetery was eventually recognized, the two



sides continued a lengthy, often vituperative battle to realize their other respective symbolic demands.

### **Summary**

Israel's landscape was thus transformed into an arena for the play of political and social dynamics, an arena for the distribution of images and the marking of political understandings having long-term implications for the status of the governing elites and parliamentary movements. The organizations founded by the state for the purpose of constructing Israel's landscape in all its manifestations — museums, memorials and military cemeteries — were utilized by Mapai to support its hegemonic status as the party responsible for Israel's independence project and, consequently, the sole party worthy of public trust. Contrary to Shamir's conclusion that "the network of relationships woven by parents, friends, the Ministry of Defense and the IDF during the late 1950s and early 1960s reflects attempts to consolidate a policy of non-intervention"<sup>162</sup> in all aspects of commemoration, I would argue that these relationships displayed tightly orchestrated intervention. Shamir's focus on the identities of the organizations involved in commemoration policy, "public" and state organizations that were not, formally, affiliated with any political movement or party, has led her to deduce "non-intervention" by the State or, alternatively, the ruling party. An altered perspective, one focusing on the outcomes of that policy, indicates assiduous exclusion from the landscape of any trace of events or the dead not associated with the Labor Movement or Mapai.

In effect, appropriation of state commemoration allowed Mapai's leadership to place material symbols of its own, partial "story" about Israel's war for national

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<sup>162</sup>Shamir, I., 1996, p. 73.

independence within the landscape; complementary narratives were left aside. Exclusion of Etzel and Lehi dead induced Herut to adopt a parallel strategy. Its resolute attempts to penetrate the landscape, accompanied by production of a counter-culture, promoted the commemoration of fallen soldiers belonging to their own political strain exclusively. Organizations closely resembling their state equivalents managed the process. It so came to pass that each party's audience was exposed to a different narrative of the War's events, leading figures, and dead.

## Chapter Four

### The Language of Sovereignty

*Ben Gurion: The Champion of Israeli Sovereignty*  
Rivka Guber<sup>1</sup>

One of the main instruments used in construction of the spirit of the time is language. Language, as a system of signs and symbols, produces and structures labels as it describes the constituents of reality, especially political reality.<sup>2</sup> It is thus an effective tool for distributing and inculcating political consciousness and collective memory. All citizens speak and write with language; they use language to define sites and processes. More than any of the institutions available for use as memory sites, language is the most intensively exploited. Through language we learn which regions have been conquered or liberated, and whether specific political actors are enemies, allies, or legitimate rivals. Hence, language is the basic medium for expression and construction of a collective worldview, for the penetration of values and dominant cultural givens.

For its users, language is therefore a lens through which its speakers view and construct reality. In order to comprehend the lens and its contours, students of language attempt to expose the *interpretive package* at its core. This package includes assumptions and ideas that support one another and that, in tandem, construct interpretations of the past and present. In general, fundamental statements and, in our

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<sup>1</sup> Rivka Guber, R., 4 November 1957, letter to Ben Gurion, D., Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Marcuse, H., 1969. *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 85-101.



case, political statements about various subjects encapsulate all the names and descriptive phrases used by individuals in the process of social discourse. These statements produce while they reflect the conceptual frames anchored in social consensus. As the frames adopted and cultivated by language disseminate social and cultural narratives about reality, they become ingrained in individual consciousness.

Among other things, frames are distributed as a result of their authors' demands for a plethora of devices, for symbols that succinctly and parsimoniously transmit the essence of a society's interpretive packages: its metaphors (images that resemble the specific form of the perceived reality), representative events (stories that confirm the package's perspective), slogans (concise statements or sayings that express the frame), images and reiterated phrases (events frequently mentioned by key figures). As Gamson and Modigliani argue, the dissemination of these frames through language is as vital a practice as is their construction. Penetration of the frames into the media, textbooks and state rituals is a condition for the transformation of these linguistic devices into daily speech; as such, the frames transform political interpretations of reality into the social consensus.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter deals with one segment of Israel's cultural production, the *language of sovereignty*, that is, the efforts of a political party — Mapai — to impose a dominant system of symbols and thereby identify itself with the national sovereignty project. This meant that political interpretive packages, dressed in the names of historical events, annual observances whose meanings were nested in the Hebrew calendar, defending warriors and fallen heroes were incorporated into the dominant culture. In the process, those dead who were clearly associated with the ruling political

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<sup>3</sup> Gamson, W.A. and Modigliani, A., 1989, Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach, *American Journal of Sociology* 95(1), 1-37.

elite acquired a standing that awarded them elevated social status and intensified societal recognition of their deeds. These ideas or themes may have been expressed in a concrete idiom, such as the monuments placed within the Israeli landscape or literature. For the most part, they remained on the level of language, in a system of phrases, disseminated and inculcated within the national consciousness through the premeditated choice of the dates with which they were associated. Events and rituals thereby acquired unequivocal political significance. This was accomplished while expressly ignoring or avoiding use of any reference to items such as dates or locations that might award recognition to competing political camps irrespective of their contribution to the national independence project at the heart of the political competition.

The main practice explored in this chapter is that of political labeling. Labeling and its outcomes became part of daily life and the culture disseminated. Dissemination is a tool for the transformation of the subjective and equivocal to the objective and taken-for-granted. Regarding national politics, some scholars have argued that dissemination of labels is the requisite strategy for establishment of a civil religion as these labels encompass all the symbolic social behaviors initiated by the state in the creation of its doctrine.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of civil religion, as a competitor to church religion, is to disseminate rituals, symbols, and nationalist interpretations among the populace by means of secular rites; it thereby "acquires" an aura of holiness. In his research, Azaryahu, for example, delves into what he terms "state rituals", the ceremonies and other practices involved with observance of memorial days.<sup>5</sup> The scope of this chapter is broader: it will illustrate how more subtle practices, such as

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<sup>4</sup> Don Yehiya, E., 1989. Sovereignty and Judaism in Ben Gurion's Philosophy and Policy, *HaZionut*, 14, p. 70. (Hebrew)

<sup>5</sup> Azaryahu, M. *State Rituals*, Ben Gurion University of the Negev. Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)



naming and labeling, the fruits of rational political manipulation, construct political perceptions of the past and the translation of those perceptions into present and future political behavior.

As pointed out in the opening chapter, the meaning of political hegemony rests on the ability of the hegemonic group to persuade the populace that only one story is true, that one narrative alone describes reality. This version is perceived as consensual, as indisputable. Here, I deal with the less obvious aspects of the attempt to construct that same irrefutable version. In doing so I will reveal the political structure beneath the linguistic and behavioral institutions just mentioned, the same institutions through which political hegemony is constructed. With the aid of individuals who assess events, images, and contexts, these institutions are themselves constructed. In order to expose these processes, an in-depth content analysis will be conducted. Such an analysis will reveal the conceptual frames with which Israel's hegemonic political elite modified society's vision so as to produce the desired political socialization.

Specifically, the content analysis will reveal the political texts that underlie the labels, names, dates and national martyrs that became the substance of Israel's civil religion during the period in question. The challenge lies in exposing the interpretative package etched within each text, including its mutually supporting assumptions and concepts. To the degree to which the various elements of the frame are internalized, they acquire precise political signatures. The frame, which is the vehicle for the covert dissemination of political ideologies, can be viewed as a narrative, in our case, the story of Israel's national sovereignty. This seemingly fortuitous narrative will employ metaphors, verbal labels, illustrative examples, and prominent figures. Taken together, these elements serve the political interpretations and elites in place.



The narrative deals with sovereignty: How it was achieved and by whom. The very use of the word sovereignty has political connotations that are still debated in the literature. Hence, this chapter will review several junctures in the construction of a language that informs the description and comprehension of the past as it relates to Israel's national sovereignty.

### **Naming the State's Banner Organization**

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as an organization, was officially established on 25 May 1948. At a government meeting held the previous day, *Order No. 4: Israel Defense Forces (1948)* was formulated, based on Article 18 of the *Law: Government and the Judiciary*; it was signed by David Ben Gurion, Prime Minister.<sup>6</sup> The IDF was meant to be the epitome of Israeli sovereignty, its banner organization. Over the years, it came to be a consensual institution, awarded broad public acceptance; for decades, criticism of the IDF was considered intolerable within Israel's cultural space.<sup>7</sup> Ben Gurion decided that the organization's name, as noted in Article 2, was to incorporate the name of its predecessor, the Hagana ("defense" in Hebrew). In this way, the Hagana was awarded the symbolic significance it had aspired to: It became sacrosanct. In effect, inclusion of the Hagana's name within the official title of the new nation's armed forces "corroborates" the claim that the IDF was the Hagana's descendant. It "proved" that the Hagana had responded to statist burdens in the pre-State era; that it had been the sole organization to staunchly express patriotic values and collective fealty. As part of the cited law, Ben Gurion would write that "[w]ith the establishment of the State, the Hagana emerged from the underground to become a regular army."

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<sup>6</sup> *Order No. 4: The Israel Defense Forces (1948)*, 26 May 1948, *Reshumot*.

<sup>7</sup> Lebel, E. 2002, Cracks in the Mirror of Military Hegemony: The Courts and the Media as Agents of Civil Society, in Koren, D. (ed.), *Public Policy and Administration in Israel*, Baltimore: Lexington.

He then went on to summarize Mapai's version of modern Jewish warfare in its various stages and organizational formats:

The Yeshuv and the Jewish people are greatly indebted to the Hagana at each phase of its existence and development, from the isolated buds during the first days of its founding in Petach-Tikva, Rishon LeTziyyon, Gedera, Rosh Pina, Zikron Yaakov, and Metula; during the days of the Shomer, recruited amongst the pioneers of the Second Aliyah; the Jewish Battalions of World War I; the Tel Hai defenders, and the steady growth of the national defense forces in the period between the two world wars; the creation of the *Notrim* (Guardians) during the 1936-1938 riots; the founding of the Palmach and the infantry; the mass volunteering during World War II and the founding of the first Jewish Brigade, until the great struggle waged by the Hagana...between 30 November 1947 until 31 December 1948.

In Ben Gurion's version of the story, repeated in *Order No. 4: Israel Defense Forces (1948)*, a document that became a widely distributed primary text, Nili, Etzel and Lehi were conspicuously missing. Prior to the founding of the IDF, Hagana efforts alone had led to Israel's attainment of sovereignty. As he wrote:

Without the Hagana's experience, operational planning capacity and power of command, its loyalty and brave spirit, the Yishuv could not have met the test of the awful bloodshed that fell upon it during the first six months [following the UN resolution partitioning Palestine] nor could it have achieved statehood. In the history to be written of the Jewish people, the chapter on the Hagana will glow with an enduring splendor and glory. We are now about to open a new chapter — the regular armed forces of the State of Israel, the army of a free and independent Israel, publicly announced in the order issued by the Interim Government, the Israel Defense Forces...All those who served in the various Hagana divisions and branches until 1 June [1948] and who participated in the defense of the Yishuv and in the war for Israel's freedom, as well as all those who now re-enlisted according to the terms of the new law

will be members of the Israel Defense Forces. Every soldier, male and female, serving in the armed forces is required to swear an oath...the moral and physical might of each soldier and officer and their dedication in the fulfillment of their duty — will enable 'the Israel Defense Forces to become the stalwart defender of the nation's peace.<sup>8</sup>

Ben Gurion would diligently stress the intense association between the IDF and the Hagana throughout his political life.

Thus, due to the exclusion implied in the IDF's name, Etzel and Lehi veterans remained ambivalent for many years about the very use of the title "Israel Defense Forces". In the public statement (May 1948) announcing Etzel's dismantling and incorporation within the IDF, Begin's attempt to avoid direct use of the name "IDF" was quite conspicuous. The phrase he preferred was "the unified army": "With the creation of the Jewish army, Etzel's fighting units are prepared to join the ranks of the unified army. Our battalions, its war-tested commanders and units, will be at the service of the general command in the fulfillment of their duty during the nation's struggle."<sup>9</sup> Etzel veterans tended to use the term "Israel's army," as did their daily newspapers, *Herut* and *Haboker*, which represented the entire liberal camp and not exclusively Herut.<sup>10</sup>

In Begin's view, Etzel as well had been established as an army in the traditional sense; hence, its inclusion in the IDF was comparable to that of the Hagana:

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<sup>8</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 31 June 1948, *Order No. 4: Israel Defense Forces (1948)*, cited in *Haboker*, 2 July 1948. (Hebrew).

<sup>9</sup> *HaBoker*, 25 May 1948. (Hebrew)

<sup>10</sup> See for example *HaBoker*, 2 June 1948: "During yesterday's search conducted by Israel's army in captured Jaffa, a large arms store was discovered." (Hebrew)



My basic assumption is that Etzel was not mobilized solely for defensive purposes...but as a [full-fledged] military force...An army of liberation is differentiated from a regular army primarily by the political function of the battle...an army of liberation cannot and must not abstain from creative political ideas nor from independent political operations whose purpose it is to obtain help, to intensify the fighting, and to hasten victory.<sup>11</sup>

For instance: "While the fighting in the Negev continues, Israel's army opens a new front in the Hebron hills."<sup>12</sup> Hagana members, on the other hand, viewed the name "IDF" as recognition of the Hagana's superior contribution to the nation. Yaakov Rifkin (MK, Mapai), in a Knesset debate on the *Casualties Law, 1954*, stated that: "The army was established on steadfast and sure foundations; it is no accident that the name 'Israel Defense Forces' [was chosen]...nor that Herut has removed the word 'defense' from the IDF's name."<sup>13</sup> Later, Zvi Shiloach (Mapai) would note the same.<sup>14</sup> Abba Eban, in contrast, would consistently refer to the "defending forces" ("hagana") whenever he mentioned the IDF.<sup>15</sup> In this manner, the status of the Hagana as the incubator of the IDF was engraved within Israel's collective consciousness.

### **Official Celebrations**

The Hagana was honored with more than inclusion of its name in the title of the branch of the state that was to be the anchor of national consensus. After independence, Tel Hai Day, 11 Adar (Hebrew calendar), was set as Defense Forces Day (*Yom Hahagana*), an event with special significance on the Israeli calendar. This

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<sup>11</sup> Begin, M., 20 October 1948, *Herut*. (Hebrew)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Rifkin, Y., 6 April 1954, debate on the *Law: Invalids (Pensions and Rehabilitation) (Amendment), 1954*, second and third reading, Meeting No. 411, the Second Knesset. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>14</sup> *Yediot Aharonot*, 8 June 1986. (Hebrew)

<sup>15</sup> Eban, A., 17 July 1949, speech made during Defense Forces Day, at the military encampment in Jerusalem, cited in *Davar*. (Hebrew)

region of collective memory, created prior to statehood, was transformed into a site for political bargaining with respect to its symbolic meaning. Despite each faction's attempts to appropriate the occasion, the national consensus continued to identify this date as symbolically meaningful. As the contest over its name was won by the dominant party —Mapai — the date was appropriated and officially identified with the Labor Movement. By renaming the event, originally meant to celebrate Jewish pioneer heroism, it became identified primarily with the Hagana.

### **Defense Forces Day and the Hagana**

Defense Forces Day was first observed in March 1949. A military parade was organized; with the Chief of the General Staff issuing a special Order of the Day:

Today, we will review all the defense forces and units from the past to the present: the *Mishmar*, the Jewish regiments, the Field Command, the Palmach, the Notrim, the Jewish Brigade that fought with the British, the fighters behind enemy lines, the soldiers and sailors who aided the illegal immigrants and the [weapons] smugglers — a huge assembly that paved the way for the Israel Defense Forces....

This rather inclusive list clearly differentiated between the Labor-associated pre-State fighting forces and Etzel Lehi, and Nili, which were excluded. From that day forward, the pilgrimage to Tel Hai, which had always been organized and identified with the incipient state, became dominated by symbolic rituals whose participants were identified exclusively with the Hagana. At the 1951 ceremony, the Minister of Education and Culture and the representative of the Hagana Veterans Association each addressed the gathering. The myth of Tel Hai gradually lost its salience, to be superseded by Remembrance Day, the official memorial day, which marked the

bravery of the post-independence IDF. Tel Hai and its connotations were observed on a lower key due to their symbolic attachment to the Hagana and the left. In 1953, it was the Histadrut — and not the government — that financed the site's refurbishment.<sup>16</sup>

Authorized celebrations were not the only events that became unequivocally linked with the Hagana. What could be considered private events organized by Hagana veterans also received state sanction and acquired the aura of "pseudo-official" events due to the patronage by members of the political and military elite — ministers, generals and, of course, prime ministers — who became permanent fixtures as guests and as speakers. This custom began at the founding convention of the Hagana Veterans Association, held on the morning of a day infused with symbolic meaning — 15 May 1949 — the date Israel was accepted into the UN. The Association felt as if international recognition of the young state's existence was the fruit of only one group's labor – their own. Prime Minister David Ben Gurion referred to the event and its connection with Mapai in his address at the convention:

We have been privileged in holding this meeting of the Hagana Veterans Association on the very day that our nation's independence has been conclusively recognized by humanity's supreme authority, the United Nations...I believe that we would not be exaggerating were we to say that it is to the honor of our defensive, fighting forces, which were born as the Hagana...and matured into the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Even-Zohar, S., 4 March 1953, letter to Horowitz, N. and others, the State Archives, 5581/4460 λ. (Hebrew)

<sup>17</sup> Ben Gurion, D., 15 May 1949, the Yad Tabenkin Archives, Section 15, the Galili Archives, Container 140, Box 2-7. (Hebrew)



Ben Gurion continued in this vein and concluded by stating that the IDF was "the Hagana's legitimate offspring."<sup>18</sup>

The symbolic identification of the Hagana with the IDF materialized in the decorations placed on the rostrum: Next to the national flag hung pictures of Herzl, Trumpeldor and Golomb.<sup>19</sup> Two organizations – Hashomer (led by Trumpeldor) and the Hagana (led by Golomb) – were presented as pioneers in the efforts for rebirth as foreseen by the nation's prophet (Herzl). Ziporah Zayd, widow of one of the Shomer's founders, Alexander Zayd, placed the first revolver used by the group on the podium.<sup>20</sup> The list of invitees also reflected the three groups; for instance, Yisrael Shochat and Rachel Yanait (Hashomer); Eliyahu Golomb's widow (the Hagana); and leaders of the political, Zionist and military elite, such as Isidore Shalit, an elder statesman of the Zionist Movement, the Minister of Police Shitrit, the Minister of Education, the Director General of the Ministry of Police, representatives of local government, the Commander-in-Chief Major General Yaakov Dori accompanied by top-ranking IDF officers, as well as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, David Ben Gurion.

The goal the Hagana Veterans Association set for itself was to influence the country's cultural, educational and communications arenas so as to perpetuate the status of the Hagana as the foremost armed contingent to participate in the national independence project. The political leadership supported this goal and its wide reach, as reported by Lt. Colonel Yehoshua Eshel, a Hagana veteran and one of the Association's founders: "...Before convening this meeting...we transmitted our intentions to the Minister of Defense and the Prime Minister...we conferred with them

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<sup>18</sup> *Davar*, 6 January 1952. (Hebrew)

<sup>19</sup> *Davar*, 16 May 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

and received their consent for our present and future activities." At this first convention, educational and cultural programs were presented to the audience, all of whom, as stated, had received political approval. As if to confirm the organization's aims, Nahum Ziv-Av, a Hagana district commander, and an Association founder, noted that the organization was to operate "in cooperation with military institutions and the Ministry of Defense."<sup>21</sup>

Another participant, Yaakov Dori, the Chief of the General Staff, firmly stated that in his view, "the values at the core of the Hagana...should represent the moral and spiritual foundations of the IDF."<sup>22</sup> By saying so, Dori effectively summoned the Hagana Veterans Association to act as an instrument of normative and ideological influence on IDF soldiers. The response to this invitation was a plethora of initiatives and intense Association involvement in the preparation of IDF educational programs to last many years. Even the Minister of Education, who had spoken before the convention on the subject "The Hagana as a Turning Point in the History of Israel," gave his blessings to the transformation of this group into an instrument for influencing the historical perspective of the nation's youth.

One of the messages that would later be distributed widely was delivered by Shaul Avigur, one of Ben Gurion's most trusted friends and advisors, who had been responsible for the Hagana's procurement program. He stressed the uniqueness of the organization. From his perspective, the Hagana was a body whose social significance lay in its contribution to unification of the Yishuv: "... prior to establishment of the State, the Hagana was the main bond forging the disparate factions of Yishuv society

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

into a whole. More than any other tie, and more than any other framework...the Hagana unified people from every class, party and individual loyalty."<sup>23</sup>

A precedent was set that night: Hagana ceremonies, like Palmach ceremonies, were made part of state ritual, with the heads of all major state institutions, from the Prime Minister to IDF senior officers, acting as their honor guard.<sup>24</sup> The Hagana Veterans Association thus became an accessible vehicle to ordinary soldiers for the dissemination of the Hagana/Mapai tradition and its version of the War's narrative and its protagonists.

### **The Anniversary of Herzl's Death**

After Mapai had officially appropriated Trumpeldor's memory, the Revisionists sought to tie themselves to some other national figure in their efforts to achieve political legitimation. The figure they chose was that of Theodor (Benjamin Zeev) Herzl, the nation's prophet and founder of modern Zionism. Similar to the bargaining that had attended the appropriation of Trumpeldor and the Tel Hai site, attempts to attach Herzl to the Revisionist Movement began before independence. As early as 1938, preparations were made to commemorate the anniversary of Herzl's death, 20 Tamuz (Hebrew calendar) in a "major display of Nationalist Movement strength."<sup>25</sup> In opposition to the official attitude, which minimized the cultural space made available to others, the Revisionists openly tried to capture some of that space by identifying

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> For example, at the fifth annual convention of Palmach veterans in May 1957, in the course of which the monument to the י"ג immigrants was dedicated on Mount Herzl, those attending included Israel's President Ben Zvi, the Chairman of the Knesset, Shprinzak, Knesset members and the Commander of the Navy. A Navy honor guard presented arms and the IDF cantor declaimed the prayer for the dead. Following the ceremony, Palmach veterans marched in a military parade along Jerusalem's streets. At the parade's head were Yigael Allon, Yisrael Galili, retired generals, and Lieutenant Colonel Michel Shacham, all in military dress. The parade's leaders were then received at the home of the President. See *Haaretz*, 23 May 1957. (Hebrew)

<sup>25</sup> Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5\1 - 27. (Hebrew)



themselves with a universally accepted, politically uncontroversial figure – Herzl. This represented an opportunity to use the "national" lexicon as a tool in its competition with Mapai's language of sovereignty, which left no place for Herut.<sup>26</sup>

On 20 Tamuz, the following invitation was transmitted to Herut members: "All of us, every true student of Herzl and Jabotinsky, will ascend to the modest grave of B. Z. Herzl in recognition of the greatness of his vision and to commemorate his deeds...." In 1954, the day was declared a holiday for members of the National Workers Federation, founded by Jabotinsky as an alternative to Mapai's Federation of Labor in Israel (the Histadrut). The day was described as "a demonstration dedicated to those who toiled to realize the Herzlian miracle."<sup>27</sup> Herut organized the events to be held at the 1954 observance with great care: agenda, transportation, placement of national flags and Movement flags, registration of members, advertisements in *Herut* as well as the daily press. Review of the event's program reveals that it was planned to demonstrate the political power of the right. On 11 July 1954, a "national convention to finalize preparations for the 20 Tamuz demonstration" was held. Also planned was "a procession to Jerusalem by the Movement's membership, with vehicles carrying large signs displaying each branch's name." Significant attention was also given to the vehicles' decorations, which included the aforementioned sign, the national flag and a photograph of Herzl. The route within Jerusalem began at Jaffa Street, passed through King George Street, and culminated at the YMCA courtyard. The effect to be made by a uniformly outfitted, densely populated column was very important to the organizers.

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<sup>26</sup> In time, Herut would call itself "the Nationalist Camp."

<sup>27</sup> Preliminary draft in preparation of 20 Tamuz celebrations (July 1954), undated. Herut Movement Headquarters, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 8\8 - 17. (Hebrew)

A special order requested that "the drivers gas up on their way to Jerusalem. No time would be made available to fill up with gas, water, or oil."<sup>28</sup>

The Herut Movement diligently worked to connect Herzl to Jabotinsky, arguing that the 1954 events would be dedicated to the two ideological "cousins" who had stubbornly adhered to political Zionism, as opposed to the practical version associated with Mapai: "This year, all members of the Herut Movement will go up to Jerusalem in order to commune with the memory of the founder of ideological Zionism and to demonstrate the integrity of our philosophy...."<sup>29</sup> The demonstration's effectiveness as a display of immense power by a huge number of participants was crucial to the organizers: "From the moment that the branch delegates reach the [YMCA] courtyard, no one will be allowed to leave...."<sup>30</sup>

The parade's participants were divided into six cohorts; they marched three abreast while carrying flags. All the marchers represented organizations and groups aligned with the Revisionist camp. The cohort carrying the national flag was accompanied by a unit holding pennants bearing either the Beitar or the National Workers Association emblem. The Association was represented by nurses, in uniform, employed by its National Workers Sick Fund. The parade's path extended from the YMCA courtyard to King George Street, along the entire length of Ben Yehuda Street, passed through Zion Square, and concluded at the entrance to Romema, one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. From there, buses carried them to Mount Herzl. A ceremony was then held in the plaza before the tomb. Beitar songs were heard, the movement's manifesto and Jabotinsky's eulogy of Herzl were read, wreathes were laid,

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<sup>28</sup> Preparatory document, 8 July 1954. Jabotinsky Institute Archives. 8\8 - 17. (Hebrew)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

and the national anthem sung. The event concluded with the Herut leadership marching around the vault.<sup>31</sup>

At the gravesite, Herzl's image was equated with the motifs of self-sacrifice and bereavement. Herut used this connection to identify its own view with official positions on the subject in an attempt to topple the barricade of Mapai's pervasive statism and to inform the public that its movement was the proper representative of patriotism:

The National Workers Association subscribes to Herzl's program in its entirety...[its members] object to every form of class struggle... [and] declare...20 Tamuz a national holiday, a day for national pioneers to express their loyalty to Herzl's ideas in their pristine form, the idea of national liberation."<sup>32</sup>

In its declaration of 20 Tamuz as a "general holiday in all employment sectors...following an interval five years in length...five years of violence that have blurred the image [of Herzl] and his significance."<sup>33</sup> Herut betrayed the political character of this act by the date it chose to celebrate labor because it differed from 1 May, the date declared as a workers holiday by its political competitor:

The 20<sup>th</sup> of May...is an alternative to the 1<sup>st</sup> of May not only because it is the anniversary of Dr. Herzl's death, but because it is a day for demonstrating the existence of a socialist model that completely contradicts that represented by the left...Our philosophy has yet to be realized and is awaiting its final formulation...[it] rests on total belief in the individual. Beitar's leader

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> National Workers Association placard, 14 July 1938, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 1\8 - 27. (Hebrew)

<sup>33</sup> *Yediot* 2, National Workers Association information circular, 20 Tamuz 1954, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 7\5 - 217. (Hebrew)



[Jabotinsky] constructed the fundamental precepts of this philosophy; it is our responsibility to demonstrate its validity through explicit acts.<sup>34</sup>

More than expressing the substance of Revisionism, it was meant to negate the ideological themes that Mapai celebrated in its own holidays: "The 1<sup>st</sup> of May... the red [Labor Movement] holiday is not ours, the red flag is not our flag...we will band together around our flag, the blue and white flag [Israel's national flag]."<sup>35</sup>

Herut's leadership had hoped that over the years, the event would be recognized as a general holiday and celebrated by the profusion of political streams active in the country: "...20 May, the national workers holiday, will acquire the character of nationwide demonstration...we should expand its framework in order to transform it into...a tradition for everyone, a national holiday [emphasis in original]."<sup>36</sup> As a means of emphasizing their strength, Herut supporters were called to decorate their homes and to display the national flag. They were also invited to:

Blue and White Balls' that will take place throughout the country on the evening of 20 Tamuz. The program will include, as customary, an address on the subject: 'Political Zionism to the Barricades!', an artistic performance during which poems by Jabotinsky and [Shaul] Tchernichovsky will be read in addition to excerpts from the writings of Herzl and [Max] Nordau, a banner procession will be held, and the national anthem sung. In addition, a ceremonial formation [will take place]...individuals who are not members of Beitar should also be invited...<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> National Workers Association placard, 20 Tamuz, year unspecified, probably 1970s. (Hebrew)

<sup>36</sup> The Central Planning Committee for the 20 Tamuz Celebration, the Executive Committee of the National Workers Association in Israel, Department of Culture and Information, undated, apparently 1938, Jabotinsky Institute Archives. 715 - 217. (Hebrew)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

The Planning Committee for a similar event, held on 21 July 1954, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Herzl's death, decided to present the nation's prophet as the spiritual father of Revisionism. Herzl, like Jabotinsky, believed in a political Zionism, and, again like his assumed disciple, Jabotinsky, Herzl had likewise been called a "rebel":

Two decades ago, under the shadows of exile, in the ghetto's gloom, Herzl had unfurled his banner. He was alone, forlorn, a rebel, yet far-reaching in his vision, bearing his mission on his solitary shoulders — an historical figure who by the force of his vision changed the world's direction...full realization of his vision has been blocked by those skeptical, puny leaders who have rejected him. The instrument Herzl envisioned — the State of Israel — fought for by his adherents, chiefly his [spiritual] heir, Zeev Jabotinsky, who paved the way for his other spiritual and ideological followers — the soldiers of the Jewish underground.<sup>38</sup>

This was not the first time that Herzl had been presented as a dissident. As part of the defense delivered during the Acre trial of the *Oley HaGardom*, Matitiyahu Shmuelevitch, one of the defendants, declared that: "Herzl as well as Jabotinsky were rebels."<sup>39</sup> This attitude acquired a permanent place in Herut indoctrination and symbols. From the day that 20 Tamuz was declared as National Workers Day, the dais would be decorated with pictures of both Herzl and Jabotinsky. Pictures of the two, as a pair, first appeared on the Tel Hai Fund logo.<sup>40</sup> After Herut's first national convention, which took place at the Ohel Shem hall in Tel Aviv on 19 October 1948, large photos of Herzl, Jabotinsky and David Raziel were to hang over the stage.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Herut Headquarters, document prepared for the 20 Tamuz celebration. July 1954, undated, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 8\8 - 17. (Hebrew)

<sup>39</sup> *Herut*, 24 December 1948. (Hebrew)

<sup>40</sup> Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 5\1 2- 7. (Hebrew)

<sup>41</sup> Weitz, Y., 1993, The Revisionist Movement and the Labor Movement, *Studies in Israel's Rebirth*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 352-353. (Hebrew)

The relative success with which Herut was able to appropriate the image of Herzl was made possible, among other things, by the fact that Mapai was not terribly eager to emphasize the place of the country's prophet in its own sovereignty project. While Herut's purpose in linking itself to the image of national consensus was to acquire political legitimacy, Ben Gurion, from his unassailable position of power, had no intention of allowing another figure to overshadow his own in the coterie of those responsible for the rebirth of the State (also known as the "third temple"). This position was buttressed by the fact that Herzl had taken no part in the Labor Movement or socialistic activities. The exact opposite was in fact true: Herzl's movement, the General Zionists, upheld liberal and secular values and would eventually tie itself to Herut within a right-wing political bloc. Herzl had also been involved in diplomacy, the same "political Zionism" that Ben Gurion and his movement eschewed if not despised. Nevertheless, when confronted with Herut's intensive efforts with respect to Herzl's image, the Knesset decided in 1948 that the anniversary of Herzl's death would be observed as "State Day." An editorial in *Davar* commented that this occasion should be considered as "a memorial day to the contemporary author of the idea of the State of Israel."<sup>42</sup> Yet, State Day was observed only once. In its place, the date on which independence was declared 14 May, would come to be celebrated as the national holiday, institutionalized in a law passed on 27 April 1949. This declaration relieved Ben Gurion of the need to share prestige for the achievement of independence with another figure; it thereby facilitated the transformation of Ben Gurion's version of sovereignty into a fundamental value in Israeli society.

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<sup>42</sup> *Davar*, 27 July 1948. (Hebrew)



Ben Gurion, though, did use Herzl's image on the first Defense Forces Day, celebrated in 1949:

Although today is the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the prophet of the Jewish nation, it is not a day of mourning or lamentation but of exaltation and thanksgiving, victory and strength, because our dream has been realized. The mortal Herzl is gone...yet, the immortal Herzl [remains]...his spirit floats above the renewed State of Israel, its builders and defenders. From this day forward, 20 Tamuz will also be an auspicious day — celebrating Herzl as well as those who realized [his dream] — Israel Defense Forces Day...The IDF was not created without a cause...the Yishuv and the Jewish people owe the Hagana an overwhelming debt...from its first isolated buds...through the Shomer...the Jewish regiments...the defenders of Tel Hai...the establishment of the Notrim during the 1936-1938 riots, followed by the founding of the Palmach and the armored divisions, the mass volunteering during World War II and the creation of the Jewish Brigade, concluding in the awesome struggle waged...during the second half of the first year of the war against us, from 30 November 1947 until 31 May 1948.<sup>43</sup>

### **Independence Day and Remembrance Day**

On 14 May 1948, following the departure of the British Mandatory government, David Ben Gurion declared the rebirth of the Jewish State in the land of Israel. Armies of the surrounding Arab states immediately invaded, bent on destroying the newly born entity. During the struggle to consolidate the infant state, Ben Gurion yearned to create a national holiday to symbolize and observe political and national sovereignty, similar to those celebrated by other nations.<sup>44</sup> Two symbols already existed: the

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<sup>43</sup> *Haaretz*, 19 July 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>44</sup> Some scholars assign the term "civil religion" to projects in which holidays and festivals exalt the national being. See for example Leibman, S. and Don Yehiya, E., 1983, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

national flag and the national anthem. The debate surrounding the choice of the specific dates was raised by the Ministry of Defense in late 1949.<sup>45</sup>

The Hebrew calendar provided several options. Among them was 20 Tamuz, the anniversary of Herzl's death, a date shunned by Ben Gurion after Herut's fairly successful appropriation of Herzl's image. Another date, 11 Adar, Tel Hai Day, the anniversary of the death of Trumpeldor and his comrades (1920), had become Defense Forces Day; although it suited Ben Gurion's purposes in that version, it nonetheless prevented broad segments of society from identifying with its substance and from participating in the ceremonies. Another option raised was 21 Tamuz, the date of the death of Chaim Nachman Bialik (1935), Israel's poet laureate. However, Bialik's life was devoid of any clear symbolic connections with Ben Gurion or the Labor Movement. Two dates remained: 2 November, that date of the Balfour Declaration (1917) symbolizing external recognition of the Jewish national aspirations, and 29 November (1947), the date the UN partition resolution passed and Jewish sovereignty in Israel was recognized internationally. The last two dates were perceived as fitting alternatives but the establishment of the State contributed an alternative that would focus on the image of Ben Gurion himself. The day the State was declared, viewed as an act of "procreation" at the hands of Ben Gurion, represented the transition from the nation's "absence" to its "presence," an occasion that separated between "before" and "after," the beginning of a new temporal sequence for Zionists and for Jews.

Ben Gurion was intent upon stressing his role in the process. The day to be chosen would symbolize, in its name as in its date, a new perspective on the events, commencing from the date of the nation's rebirth. As the formal director of the project, he was able to link the process with his own self and his efforts, not the least

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<sup>45</sup> Avigur, S., 18 December 1949, letter to the Dori, Y., Chief of the General Staff. (Hebrew)



because in the imagined "future," Ben Gurion and the Labor Movement were bound to be at the center of activity. Again, the date statehood was declared became identified with Ben Gurion personally for it was his decision to convene the Interim Government at the Tel Aviv Museum in April 1949; it appeared to be the natural choice for celebrating Israel's rebirth. Knesset ratification of the holiday's date in April 1949 thereby confirmed that Ben Gurion was indeed responsible for Israel's transition to a full-fledged state. Time was pressing and the alacrity with which the proposal was raised and voted upon prevented, as Azaryahu notes, a thorough discussion of the issue. The nation's leadership acted hastily, being interested in assigning the holiday's date as quickly as possible. It therefore sidestepped an opportunity that, "under other conditions, could have triggered an important public debate due to its relationship to questions concerning the foundations of national existence."<sup>46</sup>

The choice of the date on which national independence was declared is not self-evident. Many countries have preferred to celebrate the occasion on the date of their release from colonial bonds, a pattern set by the United States. In Israel, some members of Herut rejected Mapai's choices. As Y. Rubin, editor of *Herut* wrote: "We consider our national holiday to be the day when the British were ousted and not 29 November...the Israeli public never accepted 29 November...[they] know that the true date that changed Israel's history is the withdrawal of the British."<sup>47</sup> Thus, from the point of view of Herut, the British physical departure from Palestine was the relevant date and as such, common property. This was the same project over which Begin saw himself as leader and advocate:

On 14 May 1948, the British flag was lowered. The rebellion had succeeded.

The British Government announced that 80,000 soldiers, without cooperation

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<sup>46</sup> Azaryahu, M. 1995, p. 24. (Hebrew)

<sup>47</sup> *Herut*, 5 December 1948. (Hebrew)



from the Yishuv, were inadequate to maintain order when the terrorists began their operations by means of units equipped with modern weapons. The State of Israel was declared, an interim government was established. We [the Revisionists] made no request to be included in that government. We continued to fight for our people. On 15 May, the Voice of the Zionist Resistance announced the following: 'Etzel has abandoned the underground as we approach an independent Jewish state. In the State of Israel we will be soldiers and builders, obedient to its laws, because they are our laws, and to its government, because it is our government.'<sup>48</sup>

Debate over the date intensified when the subject of its name arose: The name of the observance would in effect imply the official name of the War as well. Legislation proposed by the government stipulated "Sovereignty Day"<sup>49</sup>: "The Knesset hereby declares that the date 14 Iyar as 'Sovereignty Day' is to be celebrated annually as the national holiday."<sup>50</sup> Etzel and Lehi veterans preferred the name "War of Liberation Day," which recalled liberation from the British Mandate. Linguistically, the word "liberation" implies removal of the burden of colonial conquest, a concept which described the British rule rather than the Arab military threat. Herut was interested in presenting the war as an anti-colonial war of liberation because, among other things, this interpretation stressed its members' role in the process. Ben Gurion, in his attempts to ignore the conflict with the British, especially the part played by Herut, moved to prevent use of the word. Yet, as a name, "liberation" was very popular. Within the framework of the Zionist discourse, it expressed the view that Zionism is a movement for the liberation of Jewry. Ben Gurion preferred the name

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<sup>48</sup> Begin, M., 12 January 1959, Proposal for a no-confidence vote submitted by Herut. *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>49</sup> This term was taken from "The Sovereignty," one of the vessels that conveyed illegal Jewish immigrants to Israel in early 1948.

<sup>50</sup> Article 1, *Law: Independence Day (1951)*. (Hebrew)

"Sovereignty Day" because it also stressed the institutional aspects of the war. For him, the word "liberation" raised associations with the past, a past in which the dissident organizations were actively involved. The concept "sovereignty," however, alluded to the present, a present that Ben Gurion and his movement, as members of the ruling group, would steer on a daily basis.

The right, on its part, continued to view the word "liberation" in its own political context. "Liberation" had already become ingrained in its rhetoric. As early as 1941, the word appeared in the eulogy written by Joseph Vinitzky on the first anniversary of Jabotinsky's death: "Israel's liberation movement will remember his words and his vision."<sup>51</sup> After statehood was gained, the public was invited to attend "Etzel's exhibit on the subject of the War of Liberation," mounted by Shelach in order to publicize the underground's part in this achievement.<sup>52</sup>

The view of the War as a struggle for liberation was accepted and internalized by large segments of Israeli's population. During commemoration services held in April 1949, it was stressed that the fighters fell "in a war for the liberation of the land of our birth."<sup>53</sup> Labor's ideological perspective, according to which "liberation" referred to the system of social relations maintained between individuals or classes that was to guide construction of a just and egalitarian society, appears not to have been absorbed by the public at large. This fact disturbed Ben Gurion, who wished to transform national rebirth into "one of the milestones in the history of Israel,"<sup>54</sup> on a par with the exodus from Egypt, receipt of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, Joshua Bin-Nun's conquest of ancient Israel, and other major events in the course of

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<sup>51</sup> *HaYarden*, 23 July 1941. (Hebrew)

<sup>52</sup> Shelach, Independence Day 1950, cite incomplete in original. (Hebrew)

<sup>53</sup> *Davar*, 13 April 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>54</sup> Ben Gurion, D., 1952, *The Status of the Zionist Federation in Israel, The Vision and the Way*, Tel Aviv: Mapai, p. 18. (Hebrew)

Jewish history and national consolidation.<sup>55</sup> Significantly, he viewed himself as solely responsible for this modern feat, the credit for which he was not willing to share with others. Thus, the same series of events were perceived as two different projects, headed by two different leaders — Ben Gurion and Begin — each jealous of his place in the respective missions.

Mapai soon began its campaign to inculcate "sovereignty" into the national consciousness. In February 1951, Yosef Dekel and Yitzhak Ben Zvi sent a letter to Ben Gurion in which they transmitted the decision reached by the Commemoration Unit's Public Council, according to which "IDF dead are to be officially called 'Martyrs of the War for National Sovereignty.'"<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the caption for the stamp to be issued for Israel's fourth anniversary was planned to read as: "In Honor of Independence Day and the Martyrs of the War for National Sovereignty."<sup>57</sup>

Although a different model was eventually accepted, Article 1 of the respective law was revised (1949) by the Knesset Internal Affairs Committee to read: "The Knesset declares that 5 Iyar will henceforth be known as Independence Day."<sup>58</sup> This decision did not in any way prevent Mapai, with Ben Gurion and Ben Zvi at its head, from retaining the term "sovereignty" as if it were the official title. At the first meeting of the Commemoration Unit's Public Council, with Ben Zvi presiding, it was decided to suggest to the government that it "change 'independence' to 'sovereignty'...." The proposal was transmitted that very day in a letter sent to the Minister of Defense and signed by Ben Zvi himself.<sup>59</sup> In 1953, in response to Uri

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<sup>55</sup> Don Yehiha, E., 1989, p. 70.

<sup>56</sup> Public Council for Commemoration, 21 February 1951, Minutes, IDF Archives, unnumbered. (Hebrew)

<sup>57</sup> Dekel, Y., 29 November 1951, letter to the Director of Postal Services. (Hebrew)

<sup>58</sup> Legislative proposal including the amended article, ratified by the Knesset on 12 April 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>59</sup> Yad Labanim, 21 February 1951, meeting protocol, IDF Archives. (Hebrew)



Avneri, a publisher, publicist and former Lehi member who had argued in favor of the name "Independence Day" and who had complained about the use made of the phrase "Sovereignty Day," Ben Gurion detailed why he favored "sovereignty":

...I prefer sovereignty to independence for two reasons: Independence is an artificial and contrived word, whereas sovereignty can be found in the Scriptures. Sovereignty...is a deeper and more daring expression for the status of free men."<sup>60</sup>

The word "sovereignty" was incorporated into the texts of every event connected with statehood that required official authorization. For instance, the history published by the Ministry of Defense in 1959 was entitled *The History of the War for National Sovereignty*. In every instance where a name for a settlement or site was to be assigned, the highest reaches of the Israeli government became involved, as in the case of the new settlement established in 1959 in the Lachish region, named *Kommemiyut* (sovereignty). Letters sent to bereaved families on the eve of Remembrance Day, 1951 was addressed as follows: "To the family of martyrs of the War for National Sovereignty. The Israel Defense Forces has decided to distribute the Sovereignty Decoration to all the soldiers that participated in the War."<sup>61</sup>

It is appropriate here to return to the events surrounding passage of the legislation regarding what would become Independence Day. As stated, the alacrity with which the proposal was passed enabled Ben Gurion to install himself as the decisive force in the culture of state ritual. As the interim between the planning and celebration of Independence Day was short, the Knesset subcommittee's decision to transfer all the relevant items to the government also transferred discretion for how the

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<sup>60</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 5 May 1953, letter to Avineri, S., Mapai Archives, 316\5376 - 2\13.

<sup>61</sup> Letter sent to bereaved families, April 1951. IDF Archives. (Hebrew)

holiday would be realized throughout the country.<sup>62</sup> The law assigns responsibility for crafting the ceremonies to the Prime Minister because it places control over national holidays within the authority of the highest reaches of government. This power was expressed, among other things, in the choice of organizations that joined the IDF — the official focus of the celebration — during the holiday's observance over the years. The military parade held in Tel Aviv in 1948 included Palmach units, who marched with their banners. However, on the eve of Sovereignty Day in the following year, 1949, special displays were prepared for a press conference. When Ben Gurion announced that the Hagana would not participate in that year's military parade, somewhat of a ruckus arose at the conference. His decision rested on his desire to ascribe a distinctively statist character to the parade, meaning that the IDF alone would participate.<sup>63</sup>

Ben Gurion's decision was not well greeted, and his explanation indicated that he sought, in effect, to exclude from popular recognition those heroes who were not members of the political coalition at whose head he stood. At the same time, he wished to stress that statist values transcended the various political factions that had survived the period of the Yishuv. As a political actor, Ben Gurion was wont to altercate with Hagana veterans from the Knesset podium over historiographical issues; his targeted efforts were meant to highlight the establishment of the State and of the IDF, both celebrated on Sovereignty Day, as the sole watershed in modern Jewish national revival. In the process, he would dwarf the contribution of other parties, even members of his own ideological camp, should they become his political rivals and certainly if they opposed his monolithic status.

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<sup>62</sup> Harari, Y., 12 April 1949. Meeting No. 23, the First Knesset, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>63</sup> *Al Hamishmar*, 27 April 1949. (Hebrew)

The fourth major symbol used to fix the identity of the war was Remembrance Day, Israel's Memorial Day.

In summer 1950, Dekel had requested that Ben Gurion raise the issue of permanent observance of a memorial day in the schools before the government.<sup>64</sup> The schools were to become the major mechanism for the inculcation of Labor Movement and Zionist values. Given the legal definition of the War's dead, the majority of Etzel and Lehi dead — unlike their colleagues from the Hagana — could not be officially recognized. The very name assigned to this observance, as we shall see, emphasized rather caustically the political advantage of one political camp over the other even in the area of death. This superiority was expressed, for example, in the Orders of the Day issued by senior officers. For instance, the Order of the Day regarding the Remembrance Day observed in 1953, prepared by Major General Mordechai Machleff, the Chief of the General Staff, made no reference to the underground's fallen:

On this Remembrance Day we shall honor the memory of our comrades, the IDF soldiers who fell so that the our nation could be reborn...[and] share their memory with their parents and families."<sup>65</sup>

The general public also seems to have internalized the message that the occasion was a "Memorial Day for the IDF soldiers who had fallen in the war for national sovereignty."<sup>66</sup> IDF war dead, we should recall, included the Hagana dead who had been officially recognized as belonging to the first group by virtue of special legislation.

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<sup>64</sup> Dekel, Y August 1950, summary of meeting with Ben Gurion, D. IDF Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>65</sup> Machluff, M. 19 April 1953. *Order of the Day: Remembrance Day*, IDF Archives, 72\90 - 156. (Hebrew)

<sup>66</sup> *HaBoker*, 20 April 1953. (Hebrew)



In 1958, the term sovereignty was entered into a legislative proposal meant to institutionalize Remembrance Day observances.<sup>67</sup> Knesset Member Shmuel Dayan (Mapai), himself a bereaved father, acting in the name of the Commemoration Unit's Public Council, proposed a law: *Remembrance Day in Honor of the Martyrs of the War for National Sovereignty*. The legislation was completed only on 28 March 1963, 15 years after independence. When passed, *Law: Remembrance Day in Honor of the Martyrs of the War for National Sovereignty (1963)*, which set 4 Iyar as the official date of its observance, was received by a standing ovation. Yad Labanim, the leading civil organization active in commemoration, noted this achievement that very year: This, the fifteenth year that Israel recognizes, with the greatest respect, the memories of its sons, its heroes, the fallen in the War for National Sovereignty and the Israel Defense Forces.<sup>68</sup>

The right's reservations about how the day would be called were raised in the debate that preceded the vote on the law. "I will begin with its name," lectured Esther Raziell-Naor (Herut) from the podium; she suggested that:

...the law be called 'Remembrance Day in the Honor of the Heroes of the War of Independence and the Israeli Defense Forces.' In the body of the law, it should state that...[this] represents an honorable commemorative observance dedicated to all the fighters for Israel's freedom and the IDF soldiers who fell in campaigns for establishment of the State and its security, to share in their memory, to ponder on their sacrifices and valiant deeds.

Acknowledging the convoluted phrasing of her suggested title, Raziell explained that from her perspective, it should refer to the many groups whose sons

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<sup>67</sup> *Motion for the Agenda (Proposal No. 609)*, 18 June 1958, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>68</sup> Yad Labanim Archives, 14 June 1963. (Hebrew)

had fallen for the sake of national rebirth because she felt that the name originally suggested excluded them:

A nation's independence — when does it occur?...From the moment that its sons do not fear to submit to the yoke of destiny...Therefore, those who fell on the Night of the Bridges and on the barbed wire surrounding Sharona, in the battle for the conquest of Jaffa and in the airport at Kastina, at the refineries and at railway workshops or, in simpler, more prosaic terms: the martyrs of the Hagana, the Palmach, Lehi, Etzel and Mahal<sup>69</sup> — all these are worthy of our respect...

In response, the Ministry of Justice, D. Yosef, rejected Raziel Naor's suggestion to change the name of the proposed law, while noting that in his view, "there is no significant difference between the expression 'war of national sovereignty' and 'war of independence'...it refers to everyone, without exception, who fell for the sake of the revival of the Jewish nation and its security."<sup>70</sup> Thus, the war's name became legally sanctioned as the War for National Sovereignty with respect to the nation's Remembrance Day as well. The term "independence" remained excluded from the official rhetoric for the time being.

In response to Raziel-Naor's demands, Mapai limited the law's referents to those who had been recognized as IDF war dead, meaning mainly Hagana troops who had been incorporated as soldiers in the IDF and who had fallen after declaration of statehood. Nonetheless, the possibility of including the underground's members remained implicit, depending on the date Etzel was disbanded and their consequent behavior.

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<sup>69</sup> Volunteers from abroad who fought in the War of Independence.

<sup>70</sup> Raziel-Naor, E. Raziel-Naor File, Jabotinsky Institute Archives. (Hebrew)

As part of the 1957 ceremonies, wreathes donated by the following bodies were to be placed on the rostrum: the Ministry of Defense, the municipalities, the Ministry of the Interior, the IDF, the Jewish Agency, Yad Labanim, the Hagana Veterans Association and the Association of Disabled Servicemen. No representative of the underground was invited.<sup>71</sup> The symbolic identification of Remembrance Day with Mapai continued into the 1960s. During the 1963 Remembrance Day observance, an official ceremony was held at the military cemetery in Nachlat Yitzhak, Tel Aviv, where a number of Lehi and Etzel dead, the majority of whom had fallen during the Altalena incident, were also buried. Among those invited to witness the military honor guard were the Minister of Justice, Pinchas Rosen, the mayors of Givatayim and Tel Aviv, members of the Hagana Veterans Association, and the parents of interred Hagana dead.<sup>72</sup> By now, Hagana veterans had become standard fixtures of Remembrance Day ceremonies throughout the country, whether as honored guests seated on the stage or as active participants in the proceedings.<sup>73</sup>

### **The Underground's Attempts to Enter Collective Memory**

Despite the elimination of any reference to Etzel and Lehi dead from official Remembrance Day rituals, some did try to mention their comrades during these occasions. Thus, for instance, in 1953, a group of Herut members initiated a ceremony in Tel Aviv to commemorate comrades originally from that city. The event was called to observe the fifth anniversary of what they called "the rebellion's victory against the British oppressor and the capture of Jaffa." The intent had been to introduce commemoration of Etzel and Lehi dead into the proceedings of an official ceremony

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<sup>71</sup> Yesheyahu, S.H., 27 March 1953, letter to Arazi, S., cited in Azaryahu, 1993, *Between Two Cities*, *Kathedra*, 68, p. 120, fn. 79. (Hebrew)

<sup>72</sup> *Davar*, 7 May 1963. (Hebrew)

<sup>73</sup> *Davar*, 2 May 1963. (Hebrew)



already packed with Hagana symbols and organized by Hagana veterans. However, the very fact that Herut "dared" to mention its contributions during the public observances riled Mapai officials. They viewed this action as a provocation: "We fear that the said gathering will disturb the festive aura of the public celebrations on the following Independence Day," wrote a Ministry of the Interior official to a member of the event's Organizing Committee.<sup>74</sup> The issue raised considerable indignation, which induced the Committee to express its serious objection to an event that they viewed as "political" in nature. Although the event was cancelled, Herut did make its mark on Tel Aviv's commemorative activities by means of a permanent commemorative plaque (see Chapter Three). Remembrance Day observances thus retained their general and official aura, bereft of reference to the underground's dead.

#### **Public Exposure: David Raziel, 23 Iyar**

As stated, Etzel and Lehi attempts to inculcate public celebrations of Israel's dead failed during this period. The Labor elite stubbornly refused their entry. During the debates over passage of the law *Remembrance Day in Honor of the Martyrs of the War for National Sovereignty and the Israel Defense Forces* (1963), MK Esther Raziel-Naor (Herut) expressed her colleagues' feelings about Mapai's attitude thusly:

...even if the desire to repay the debt of honor that the Knesset owes to those who sacrificed their lives, but for the tears of their bereaved mothers and the choking pain of their fathers — on this day, [their] graves in the military and civilian cemeteries remain forsaken, no representatives of the Knesset or the government or any of the important institutions listed here before us, honorable Minister of Justice, have visited these dead...The graves of the martyrs of the Jaffa's conquest, of the Altalena, of those who were hanged

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<sup>74</sup> Yesheyahu, S.H., the Ministry of the Interior, 27 March 1953, letter to Arazi, S., cited in Azaryahu, 1993, p. 120, fn. 79.

remain deserted even on the eve of Independence Day. It appears to me that the time has come to abolish this type of abysmal and strident discrimination.<sup>75</sup>

Raziel-Naor's plea was to no avail. And so, Herut adopted an alternative strategy in 1953, that of boycotting the official Remembrance Day rituals while observing an alternative Memorial Day: 23 *Iyar*, the date that David Raziel, Etzel's first commander, was killed. The date had, in effect, been declared "the Memorial Day for David Raziel and Etzel martyrs" by Herut as early as 5 December 1948.<sup>76</sup> With the announcement of the official Remembrance Day, the underground's members had hoped that commemoration of their own dead would be included in the general framework. Labor's refusal to do so induced them to continue to observe the alternative date. As Shelach was to justify this move: "Being forsaken, without a relative or friend to remember them, other than their comrades in arms and their ideology...."<sup>77</sup>

Considering Herut's goal of obtaining legitimation, it is understandable if still surprising that the practices associated with 23 *Iyar* would more and more come to resemble those initiated by the State: honor guards, the presence of former commanders on the rostrum, sites chosen for their symbolic import, as well as commemorative services conducted throughout the day at the cemeteries where the dead were interred in addition to services conducted at sites where the dissident's had displayed exceptional bravery. Like the official models, Herut's rituals were repeated annually, until the practices could be treated as if they were elements of a unique subculture. The central event of the day was the ceremony conducted at Ramat Raziel

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<sup>75</sup> Law: *Remembrance Day in Honor of the Martyrs of the War for National Sovereignty and the Israel Defense Forces (1963)*, 25 March 1963, first roll call vote, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>76</sup> *Herut*, 5 December 1948. (Hebrew)

<sup>77</sup> Shelach, 19 April 1953, letter to bereaved families, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 23\5 - 167. (Hebrew)

in honor of David Raziel, followed by similar ceremonies at the execution gallery in the Acre garrison, at the graves of its attackers in Shivei Tziyyon, at the graves of the hanged Lehi fighters located in Safed, with a parade ending at the courtyard before the Gruner memorial in Ramat Gan. A special committee was likewise charged with guaranteeing that the services held in the cemeteries were all identical and that a eulogy honoring the dead was written and properly declaimed.<sup>78</sup> Herut's Commemorations Committee would annually place an advertisement in the daily newspapers and Shelach would arrange transportation for the bereaved families to the sites.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the counter-culture that evolved, participants at the ceremonies complained about Labor's indifference to the ceremonies given the presence of military personnel and government officials at the Hagana ceremonies: "The involvement of IDF soldiers is permitted only during commemorative ceremonies organized by the IDF itself" responded General Moshe Tzadok, head of the IDF's Personnel Division, to the members of the Lochamim Party, then involved in preparing a ceremony honoring the Haifa railway workshops operation. "Hence, your request for the participation of an armed military honor guard...is denied."<sup>80</sup> The denial is illustrative: it represents a process that operated in all areas of commemoration. Because the ceremonies held by former underground members and their current political representatives were treated as "political" events – as opposed to the Mapai Government's "consensual" events – IDF participation could be formally denied. At the same time, this "political" quality prevented their transformation into

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<sup>78</sup> Shelach Commemorations Committee, Iyar 1954, letter to bereaved families, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 23\5 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>79</sup> Advertisement, undated, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 23\5 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>80</sup> Tzadok, Gen. Moshe, Head, the Personnel Division, IDF, undated, letter to the Lochamim Party, the Lochamim Party Archives, Beit Yair, files 37-38-39. (Hebrew)



official, statist ceremonies. To paraphrase, on the declarative level, Ben Gurion treated the ceremonies organized by the Labor elite and its supporters as national and thus an apolitical events, whereas the ceremonies held by rival parties excluded from power, were treated as sectoral and thus political. The structural consequences were the further marginalization of Herut and its supporters.

### **Herut's Commemorative Ceremonies: Labor's Rebuff**

Commemorative observances in honor of Etzel and Lehi fallen were, in effect, located beyond the pale of official recognition and certainly of public or political legitimacy. No Ministry of Defense or IDF personages ever attended. Herut's response is illustrated by the following exchange of letters, the first written to its organ, *Herut*: "Was the nation's President invited to participate in the commemorative service to Etzel's commander and his soldiers? If yes, what was his answer? And if no, why? This is especially important today in light of the President's presence at a commemorative service and dedication of a monument to Palmach recruits."<sup>81</sup> The letter's author received a personal reply from the Secretary of the Herut Movement, who also suffered the slight referred to:

...We have frequently invited the President to attend several of our ceremonies, including those held on 23 Iyar...Each time, we received an evasive answer, and he never appeared. For this reason, we no longer extend any invitations.<sup>82</sup>

This practice continued throughout the first decade of the State, until 14 May 1959, when a change in direction, however partial, occurred. In 1959, Etzel and Lehi

<sup>81</sup> Ben Meir, Y., 22 May 1957, Letter to the Editor, *Herut*, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 23\5 - 16\5. (Hebrew)

<sup>82</sup> Secretary of Herut, 28 May 1957, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 23\5 - 16\5. (Hebrew)

veterans decided to conduct commemorative ceremonies on Remembrance Day as well as to continue to hold ceremonial gatherings on 23 Iyar at the sites symbolizing the Revisionist heritage.<sup>83</sup>

### *Yizkor* (Remember)

The Labor Movement's imprint on official symbols was expressed, among other things, by *Yizkor*, the liturgical portion of the canonical Remembrance Day ritual. This prayer would be periodically revised, according to the ideological and political powers in place. The first version was written in 1920 by Berl Katznelson, one of the Movement's founding fathers as a secular equivalent to the prayer for the dead invoked during religious funerary services. Early in 1949, the Jewish Agency's Information Department raised the idea of preparing a commemorative prayer dedicated to War of Independence dead.<sup>84</sup>

Katznelson's early version of *Yizkor* was written in homage to the eight Tel Hai defenders, especially Trumpeldor. It was printed 10 days after their deaths, on the front page of *Contras*, the Achdut HaAvoda gazette. It began: "May god remember the valiant men and women who braved mortal danger in the days of struggle...." The text is replete with images reflecting the Labor Movement's soldier-farmer ideal, whose one hand held a gun and the other a plough. The eulogy became a national symbol, a text to be read whenever someone fell by Arab hands.

During the transition period between the pre-State Yishuv and statehood, many IDF officers turned to Ahuvia Malchin, an editor of the Am Oved publishing house

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<sup>83</sup> Hall, G., 14 May 1959, In Memorium, *HaBoker*. (Hebrew)

<sup>84</sup> Azaryahu, 1995, p. 151.

and a member of the IDF's Department for Cultural Affairs, for guidance regarding the texts to be read during military funerals. Joseph Kariv (Karkovy), head of the Department of Cultural Affairs, set before Malchin and the poet Aharon Zeev, the future Chief Education Officer, the task of adapting Katznelson's prayer to the IDF context. Moreover, it was decided that the authority to determine future versions of *Yizkor* would rest with the director of the Government Information Office, a body then headed by Yehuda Ilan, the Palmach's former Officer for Cultural Affairs. Although all the phrases directly identified with the Labor Movement were expunged from the revised version,<sup>85</sup> the public was conscious of its source, a politically rooted eulogy. The eulogy was revised to focus on the IDF fallen that fell only during the War. As to the changes, Shamir was to write that:

...from then on, War of Independence dead, soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces, will be remembered for generations. They alone, not those others who had died for the sake of the Yishuv and the incipient nation in the days before 30 November 1947, will be remembered.<sup>86</sup>

In 1955, *Yizkor* was revised once more. The new version, whose references were expanded to include IDF dead from campaigns following the War of Independence, appeared at the opening of the first *Yizkor* commemoration volume, the book that listed all those officially recognized as fallen during the War of Independence (see Chapter Five).<sup>87</sup> The present version retains the main body of the text, with the community of the dead enlarged to include "the valiant men and women

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<sup>85</sup> Shamir, I, 1999, *The Changes Undergone by Yizkor*, Lecture, Conference on the Culture of Commemoration and Remembrance, Ministry of Defense, Commemoration Unit, August 1999. Tel Aviv. (Hebrew).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> The Ministry of Defense, 1955, *Yizkor*. (Hebrew)



who braved mortal danger in the days of struggle prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and the soldiers who fell in the wars of Israel."<sup>88</sup>

Eulogies in the form of commemorative prayers had existed earlier, during the period of rebellion against the British. Both the Palmach<sup>89</sup> and Etzel<sup>90</sup> had their own versions of *Yizkor*. These were printed in the commemorative volumes prepared for the fallen of each respective group. However, the Palmach volumes, like the later IDF-authorized *Yizkor* volumes, stressed the war against the Arabs; hence Etzel and Lehi dead were again excluded. Shelach was forced to utilize its own version of the prayer<sup>91</sup> in its struggle to draw the public's attention to two issues that Labor and Mapai wished to avoid — that the War of Independence had begun as a struggle against the British and that several members of the underground had been assassinated by the Hagana, as we shall see.

### **The Production of National Heroes — Decorations and Citations**

The left excluded the right from many areas related to commemoration, not least of which was official recognition of its heroes. On the eve of Remembrance Day 1951, a letter was sent to bereaved families under the heading "To the Families of the Heroes of the War for National Sovereignty," in which Ben Gurion announced that "the Israel Defense Forces has decided to award the *Komemmiyut* [Sovereignty] Decoration to all the soldiers who had participated in the War of Independence."<sup>92</sup> In November of that

<sup>88</sup> See <http://www.israel.org/mia/go.aspMFAH00yb> for the latest version of the poem.

<sup>89</sup> Brenner, A., 1988, *The Palmach: Regular Soldiers and Officers*, Tel Aviv: The Palmach Association. (Hebrew).

<sup>90</sup> Shelach, 1949, *In Their Lasting Memory*. (Hebrew)

<sup>91</sup> "Israel, remember your sons and daughters, the soldiers of the National Military Organization and its officers, those courageous and bold volunteers who had sacrificed their lives for the sake of the nation's liberty and the country's liberation. Israel, remember your heroes and your martyrs who were hanged, who fell in the defense against the Arab hordes..." [my translation].

<sup>92</sup> Ben Gurion, D. April 1951, letter to bereaved families. IDF Archives. (Hebrew)

year, a public competition for the design of the decoration was announced.<sup>93</sup> The design chosen was a ribbon colored blue and white — representing the nation — and red, representing blood and sacrifice, the ultimate price paid by all those to whom the State owed its existence: "Every soldier who served in the IDF between 1 February and 10 March 1949," the period Israeli forces were active in the Eilat area proximate to the official close of the War of Independence.<sup>94</sup> Given the announcement's wording, it was clear that fighters belonging to organizations not incorporated within the IDF by that date were ineligible. All told, the Disabled Veterans Decoration was awarded to more than 1,500 disabled ex-servicemen.<sup>95</sup>

Enthralled by the symbolic and political functions of decorations, Ben Gurion turned, in 1952, to the Golomb Committee, whose members — Eliyahu Golomb, Yisrael Galili, Major General Yaakov Dori and Colonel Nahum Shadmi — were all veterans of the Hagana. Ben Gurion assigned it the task of setting policy regarding the award of state decorations and citations to outstanding individuals who had made distinguished contributions to the defense effort in the period preceding the State's creation of a national military presence. His instructions clearly reveal the tendency to ignore members of organizations from the rightist camp:

You are requested to act as a committee that will propose decorations, such as the Sovereignty Medal...to all those who helped defend [the Yishuv] prior to the establishment of the State, that is to members of the Shomer, the Jewish regiments during World War I, the Hagana before the IDF, those who served in Jewish Brigade during World War II, individuals who participated in the defense of our settlements during the War of Independence but were not members of the IDF, to settlements that, as units within regional divisions

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<sup>93</sup> *Davar*, 25 November 1951. (Hebrew)

<sup>94</sup> Ben Gurion, April 1951, letter to disabled veterans, Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>95</sup> The decoration was eventually awarded during the Remembrance Day 1954 observances, see Azaryahu, 1995, p. 112, fn. 2.

(Jerusalem, Negba, etc.) had distinguished themselves in their fortitude during the War, as well as all those unaffiliated individuals who sacrificed their lives for their country ....<sup>96</sup>

As can be readily seen, Etzel and Lehi were not included by name in this rather comprehensive list.

The Golomb Committee recommended four categories for commendation: three for individuals, and one for kibbutzim and other settlements (moshavim, villages and towns). The Committee's intentions are revealed in its report, presented to the Minister of Defense. They suggested that 26 decorations and citations be distributed, including "about 20 of whom are to be chosen from among our comrades...It would be preferable for those selected to represent, as much as feasible, every type of [major] operation and event from the period."

The first decoration, intended for "our comrades" was the Hagana Medal. The idea was not original: In February 1949, it had been announced that a special decoration would soon be awarded to members of the Hagana, including those already released from service.<sup>97</sup> The Hagana Medal would mark:

...the nation's gratitude to those of its sons who fulfilled their duty to protect the nation and to defend the Jewish settlements in Israel, from the period of the First Aliyah until the formation of the Israel Defense Forces...On one side of the medal the symbol of the State of Israel will be found, on the other side, the symbol of the Hagana, a sword encircled by an olive branch....

The second decoration recommended by the committee was the "National Volunteers Medal." The medal resembled the Hagana Medal, but in different colors.

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<sup>96</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 3 January 1952, Letter to Galili, Y.. Yad Tabenkin Archives, Section 15 — the Galili Archives, container 140, file 5 - 20. (Hebrew)

<sup>97</sup> *Haaretz*, 10 February 1949. (Hebrew)



The third decoration proposed by the committee was the "Magen David Medal," also known as the "Medal for Excellence." This decoration was to be awarded to whoever could be considered "an example of his generation for risking his life — this medal will be awarded to 35 individuals only...the Minister of Defense will appoint a committee authorized to recommend the 35 candidates." In form, the medal would "resemble the Hagana Medal."

The "Jerusalem Medal" was the fourth decoration proposed. The committee suggested that it be awarded to the "settlement, village or town for its independent collective resistance during the enemy blockade and for its determined resistance."

To summarize, other than the medal to be awarded to a settlement, three were to be awarded to individuals: the first only to Hagana personnel, the second to volunteers, and the third to those individually selected by the Minister of Defense according to his discretion. It would be awarded to those who had volunteered "to defend Jewish settlements...from the period beginning with the First Aliyah and ending with the establishment of the State of Israel. Etzel and Lehi veterans, were ineligible for the first decoration — an award based on political parameters — yet they were also disqualified from receiving the second. The ploy used to exclude them was affiliation: had they been defined or categorized as members of the Jewish Brigade, the Palmach, the Yishuv's Jewish police forces or Jewish units serving in the British Army, blockade-runners, Hagana servicemen involved in weapons production or purchase, in addition to anyone "who had served as a regular officer in the Hagana," or "voluntarily served as an officer in the Hagana," or had participated "in an emergency mission on behalf of the Hagana," or had been "any man or woman, Jewish or otherwise, living outside Israel, who had made a contribution to the Hagana and to the Yishuv's security..." they might have been, in theory, eligible. But they were not. The

committee also decided that Independence Day, 1952, would be "declared as the date for award of the decorations."<sup>98</sup>

Years later, in December 1954, State decoration policy was again debated and confirmed by the Knesset in the form of the *Law: Israel Defense Forces Decorations (1954)*. The original proposal had been raised by MK Baruch Kamin (Mapai):

The proposed law is meant to fill a gap that has been felt since the establishment of the State, one that pertains to the [public] recognition of soldiers who sacrificed their lives in acts of exceptional bravery on the battlefield, or those who excelled in their courage or their service.<sup>99</sup>

Kamin stressed that the project provided a framework in which the State would identify its heroes, those individuals whose acts would be etched in the collective memory regarding the State's rebirth. Kamin also commented that he was referring to all those brave individuals who promoted emergence of the new state, and not exclusively to IDF troops:

Award of a decoration for these acts expresses the State's recognition of its soldiers...the nation's appreciation...in a way similar to that practiced in all the world's armies...The decorations will be awarded to members of the Israel Defense Forces as a rule. However, the medal for military bravery can also be awarded to civilians who performed exceptionally courageous acts...on the battlefield....

A further reading of Kamin's remarks indicates that the recipients of these decorations were to serve as cultural, normative and educational instruments, as models for emulation:

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<sup>98</sup> Galili, Y. Dori, Y., Jacobson, J., and Shadmi, N., 20 July 1952, report to Ben Gurion, D., the Yad Tabenkin Archives, Section 15, the Galili Archives, File No. 5-20. (Hebrew).

<sup>99</sup> Meeting, 20 December 1954, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

Decorations for bravery play an important part in the lives of the people and the nation...The more a nation struggles, suffers, and sacrifices, the more it commits acts of bravery, the more important are the decorations it awards as patriotic, educational and normative tools. After all, the European nations conferred medals not only for their regular armies, but also for acts of patriotism, beginning with soldiers standing at the rear, where they were joined by civilians and youths who gradually became part of the regular army under military command...the decorated must retell their stories to their companions. What has undermined and continues to undermine our youth in many areas appropriate to volunteering is...[the comment] 'Did you do it, did you act, and who knows about it, who appreciates it?' ...As to the ancient adage 'the Moor has done his work, the Moor may go'...this law is meant to rectify...the distortion.<sup>100</sup>

Kamin concluded his justification of the State's award of decorations by adding a few personal remarks intended to call attention to what he termed "oversights." As he saw it, among the ranks of the eligible for commendation were those "citizens in the agricultural collectives who volunteered for missions during World War II...at the height of self-sacrifice...I refer to the parachutists, members of the Jewish Brigades and the Palmach...who left their families...and volunteered to fight...the Nazi enemy...." These, he argued, unlike Hagana members, "lack any IDF status," a fact frequently overlooked. Zeev Shefer (Mapai) supported Kamin's position, and reminded the Knesset that:

...during the War of Independence, those who fought did not come exclusively from the ranks of the army...why not give them as well the right to wear the Sovereignty [*Komemmiyut*] Medal? Until now, we discriminated against them...It troubles me to see these displays of lofty Jewish armed courage...rent from the pages of history...I therefore ask: How much would

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



this add to the nation, its youth, its citizens...were we to decorate members of the Shomer, as well as those who fought at Tel Hai...the defensive campaigns in Jerusalem, Petach Tikva, Jaffa....

Shefer underscored his demands with the statement that Jewish defense did not begin with the creation of the IDF, and that the:

Knesset was obligated to pay homage to the leading members of this group from its outset...If there is any value or symbolic importance to this commemorative medal, we should make sure that it is ... considered as a sign of universal, national commemoration. We will never regret it; the nation can only gain from it.<sup>101</sup>

Kamin's and Shefer's comments, as might be expected, ignited Herut MKs. They sorely felt the truth of Kamin's comments about those who lacked any IDF status. "We cannot educate such heroes, only worship them," declared Yohanan Bader (Herut) during that debate. In addition to his general support of the suggestion to broaden eligibility for the medal, he voiced Etzel and Lehi fears that their members were to be barred from this group as well.

We will not award these medals to the Maccabees, nor will we award them to Bar Kochba, Trumpeldor, or Zeev Jabotinsky...Who but the people can award a medal to Dov Gruner; can any decoration add to his value or to his personality? And who can augment the worth of those who lost all hope upon the gallows? Who? — I believe, only history. I support this proposal...no one would envy them, and certainly not those among the underground who survived, nor would they envy those who gave their lives for the nation as volunteers and as rebels....

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

In his closing statement, Bader stressed that because the policy regarding decorations was fixed by Mapai's political interests, this "law...will not produce heroes, nor add to heroism's glory."<sup>102</sup>

Bader's words induced others to voice their bitterness over trends that they were beginning to observe. The decorations project, they realized, was another layer in the commemoration project whose realization was just beginning to be felt in Israel's landscape and its historiography, all orchestrated by Ben Gurion. The response was, surprisingly, non-partisan. "Ben Gurion wants independence to be identified only with the undertaking that he directed — the War of Independence" implored Shmuel Dayan, a member of Mapai. His colleague, Abraham Herzfeld, raised doubts about the willingness or ability of fellow politicians to influence history so substantially that they could determine its heroes. Herzfeld's remark accompanied his warning that the proposal to distribute medals was threatening internal harmony:

I have serious doubts about our objective capacity, divided as we are [as a nation], to single out these events and to place each in its separate framework, as suggested by this legislative proposal...Friends, we should avoid the issue. We cannot foresee how much bloodshed it can incite...just how many hotheads are among us...A history rich [in such events] brought us to Statehood...It may have begun even more than 80 years ago....

Herzfeld believed that politically motivated attempts to identify and dramatize national heroes would, by definition, slight a significant number of worthy individuals and goad many others: "It would be a mistake for our comrades and for those of us

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid. Also, note that in light of Ben Gurion's refusal to award the medal to those of Jabotinsky's followers who actively fought the British during the years 1936-1940, Etzel and Lehi veterans were surprised when he offered to award the medal to Zeev Jabotinsky for his participation in the Jewish Brigades.

like myself who are aware of the current history of the Yishuv to demand award of these decorations...."<sup>103</sup>

Despite the outspoken objections and bitterness, Minister of Defense Lavon (1953-1955) stubbornly continued to maintain that the proposed decorations policy would not manufacture Israel's history but, rather, reflect it:

Many of the speakers have confused two factors: history and law...the reality of Jewish courage — did not begin with independence or with the Hagana...it is a historic phenomenon replete with blood and glory...but it is history. Laws do not make history...laws cannot compete with eulogies in their influence on the fate of a nation.

A reasoned and inclusive representation of the nation's fallen, thought Lavon, one that was objective and devoid of special interests, was characteristic of the project, a project which nonetheless ignored those aligned with the underground: "It [the law] does not pretend to at all to accomplish what only a huge commemorative volume can achieve — if that were at all possible."<sup>104</sup>

Yet, opposition to the law did have any effect. It was only in May 1959 that a government decision was reached as to its final version, which determined that "in future, the Ministry of Defense would award decorations only according to government decisions or a specially legislated law."<sup>105</sup> That is, decorations policy would be determined by the Knesset. The debate had, in effect, been further politicized. Just a few months previously, it had been decided to award the Hagana

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> *Government Decision No. 423*, 10 May 1959. (Hebrew)



Medal during the celebration of Israel's first decade (*Hag Ha'asor*) that Ben Gurion had decreed.

And so, the medal was awarded to veteran Hagana officers in a ceremony involving the participation of the President of Israel, Yitzhak Ben Zvi, and the IDF's first Chief of the General Staff, Yaakov Dori. The President pinned the medal on the lapel of Prime Minister Ben Gurion's coat who, in turn, pinned medals on the uniforms of the members of the General Staff. The ceremony, conducted as a state ceremony attended by invited public figures, was held in the National Stadium in Jerusalem, and declared to be part of Defense Forces Day festivities. In addition to the President, Prime Minister and IDF generals, the current Chief of the General Staff Chaim Leskov and Minister Yisrael Galili were in attendance. The Israel Police Force Orchestra accompanied the event; on the rostrum sat senior officials from the Ministry of Defense and the Mayor of Jerusalem.

In his address, Ben Zvi stated that from his perspective, being awarded the Hagana Medal was "the greatest honor a person in Israel can receive." Ben Gurion, who followed, reviewed the history of Jewish defense of the Yishuv in a style reminiscent of an "order-of-the-day" announcement, while skipping over Nili, Etzel and Lehi. After mentioning the Shomer, the Jewish Brigade and the Hagana, he noted that the IDF is the "offspring and disciple of the Hagana and that Hagana veterans know that the IDF is their descendant."<sup>106</sup> The Hagana Medal thus became an official decoration, part of the dress uniform<sup>107</sup> worn by IDF soldiers who had also served in

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<sup>106</sup> *Davar*, 10 June 1958. (Hebrew)

<sup>107</sup> Palmach Veterans Association, undated, placard: *Urgent Announcement to Palmach Members*, inviting its members to a ceremony, detailing the arrangements, Kibbutz Hameuchad Archives, 9 - 7\2π. (Hebrew)

the Hagana, whereas regular servicemen and officers were required special permission to wear the medal during ceremonies.<sup>108</sup>

Also noteworthy with respect to the historical role of the Hagana during the Yishuv, was the award of the Disabled Ex-Servicemen's Decoration on Independence Day, 5 May 1954. At this ceremony, conducted in the Rose Garden opposite the government compound in Jerusalem, cabinet ministers, Knesset members and numerous Hagana veterans stood beside Ben Gurion who, as Prime Minister, personally presented the decoration to each recipient.<sup>109</sup>

### **David Raziell — Reinterment**

One particularly significant commemoration project undertaken by Etzel veterans was the attempt to install the organization's first commander, David Raziell, within the pantheon of Israel's heroes. The institutional resistance to their efforts was minor in comparison to Ben Gurion's attempts to sabotage the return of Jabotinsky's body to Israel (see below). Jabotinsky had been marked as the Labor Movement's ideological rival, the person who had chiseled rejection of its political, social and economic program on his seal. Within the framework of Labor policy, every sphere of civil life was nationalized: under the banner of statism, a political party — Mapai — became the sole manager of that policy. Although Raziell was the commander of an alternative military organization and a renegade, his legacy did not include a worldview that threatened the party in power. Thus, his heirs were intent on preserving his military legacy which they believed a more reachable goal.

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<sup>108</sup> Only in May 1959 was it decided that "IDF soldiers are forbidden to wear the Hagana medal." *Decision No. 423*, 10 May 1959, IDF Archives, unnumbered.

<sup>109</sup> *Davar*, 6 May 1954. (Hebrew)

In 1952, Esther Raziell-Naor (Herut), while sitting in the Knesset, began her activities among influential figures and government officials in London for the purpose of returning Raziell's remains to Israel from his burial place in Iraq. Her activities led to contacts between the British Embassy in Baghdad and the Iraqi Minister of Health; together they convinced the Iraqi government to transfer the coffin to Cyprus with the aid of the British Royal Air Force. On 19 December 1955, the coffin was transported from Habniya, Iraq to Nicosia and then interred locally, in Kfar Margo, Cyprus.<sup>110</sup> During the whole of 1956, British pressure on the Cypriot government prevented the coffin's transfer to Israel. Only the intervention of Menachem Begin, who wrote to Archbishop Makarios, later President of Cyprus, as "one freedom fighter to another," persuaded the Cypriots to allow the coffin to reach Israel.<sup>111</sup>

Herut then turned to Prime Minister Ben Gurion and to the Deputy Minister of Defense with a request for permission to conduct a military funeral for Raziell in the national military cemetery on Mount Herzl. Agreement was reached thanks to the intervention of Shimon Peres, who was particularly active in obtaining the permission for such funerals, and a military funeral took place on 15 March 1961. Previously, an official delegation headed by Yaakov Meridor (Herut), including Shelach representatives and Israel's ambassador to Cyprus had been present when the coffin was disinterred in Cyprus before transport to Israel. A police cortege accompanied the coffin from the airport to Metzudat Zeev, Herut headquarters in Tel Aviv. Thousands of Herut supporters awaited its arrival; during that evening, Herut leaders held a vigil dedicated to Raziell's memory.

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<sup>110</sup> Naor, A. 1991, *David Raziell*, Tel Aviv: Maarachot. Ministry of Defense, p. 282. (Hebrew)

<sup>111</sup> Begin, M. Letter to Archbishop Makarios, *Herut*, 17 March 1961. (Hebrew)



The next day, the military cortege set out to Mount Herzl, again accompanied by thousands including Knesset members and local government officials associated with the right. Meridor delivered the farewell address: "...So many Israelis will accompany you as an Israeli army honor guard salutes [you,] the commander of Etzel,"<sup>112</sup> words that imply that Meridor was ashamed to admit that the name of the Hagana — i.e., in its denotative sense, defense — had been incorporated into the name of the nation's armed forces. The procession continued to Tel Aviv's main synagogue (*Beit Haknesset Hagadol*) on Allenby Street, with the surrounding streets closed to traffic. Crowds gathered on the pavement along the route to pay their respects, and police officers marched in the procession, which wound its way to Jerusalem, accompanied by two military policemen on motorcycles. Those who gathered on the road were described by one journalist as "a huge column...thousands upon thousands packed the streets...."<sup>113</sup> The spontaneous gathering of such numbers highlighted the institutional ambivalence regarding the funeral. Despite its official designation as a military funeral, the only signs of this status were the two military policemen on motorcycles, and the military vehicle that carried the coffin. Government representation was also low-keyed: at the ceremony held at the Russian Square in Jerusalem, neither Yitzhak Ben Zvi, the President of Israel, nor the Minister of Defense were present. In their place, there appeared the President's deputy and the Minister's Military Secretary. At the interment service, also conducted in military fashion, no senior officers participated, as would be expected. Instead, the armed forces were represented by the IDF's Chief Rabbi and by a colonel. Hence, although

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<sup>112</sup> Cited in Naor, 1991, p. 284.

<sup>113</sup> *Herut*, 17 March 1961. (Hebrew)

official permission was granted to bury Raziell on Mount Herzl with military honors, the honors were more administrative than real.<sup>114</sup>

It appears that the conduct of Raziell's funeral only strengthened Ben Gurion's determination to object to the transfer of Jabotinsky's remains to Israel. The force of the street's identification with the event, and the multitudes that followed Raziell's cortege in Jerusalem<sup>115</sup> as in Tel Aviv were interpreted as evidence of the opposition's strength. The event's organizers were well aware of the political significance of a procession years before it actually occurred:

The funeral procession, which we believe will be grand, will display the obligatory honor and veneration to be shown to our great commander, the power and glory of our entire movement, precisely [emphasis in original] in a period of flagging spirits and little faith, at a time when the entire [Jewish] world is convening — at the Zionist Congress — and masses of Jews from the Diaspora as well as Israel can witness this great national event — [honoring] its warrior and liberator.<sup>116</sup>

### **Return of Jabotinsky's Remains**

Immediately following the establishment of the State, Herut began intensive efforts to convince the authorities to return Jabotinsky's remains for reburial in Israel. Their spiritual leader's will demanded that only a legitimate government in a Jewish state could order that his body be brought to Israel. For this reason, Herut's leaders as well as Jabotinsky's family refrained from doing so independently and focused on pressuring the government to initiate the project, in compliance with the will's terms.

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<sup>114</sup> Katznellenbogen, B., 2 May 1961, letter to Minister of Defense, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, - 167 23\5. (Hebrew)

<sup>115</sup> *Maariv*, 17 March 1961. (Hebrew)

<sup>116</sup> Shelach. Letter to the Herut Movement's Central Committee. 15 April 1956. (Hebrew)

The first public debate on the subject took place in December 1951. At that time, Rabbi Norick (Mafdal), a Knesset member, presented a query to Prime Minister Ben Gurion, in the framework of which he referred to Jabotinsky issue. In his response, Ben Gurion stated that:

...the obligation of the State of Israel is first and foremost to bring living Jews to the country, those who would build our country and the Jewish people; this is what the Government of Israel is striving to do. The memory of individuals worthy of [the transfer of their remains to Israel] will rest in the nation's heart, irrespective of where their remains are to be found.<sup>117</sup>

Public and private organizations made similar demands over the years — including the Zionist Federation based in the US. Some Mapai members of the government, in cooperation with their coalition partners, likewise requested such an action. In 1954, Israel Rokach (Liberals), the Minister of the Interior, raised the issue before the government but nothing was done. Pinchas Rosen (Mapai), while Minister of Justice, likewise attempted to acquire agreement to do so.<sup>118</sup> On 3 August 1958, after Rosen had once more made such a proposal, it was again rejected due to Ben Gurion's personal opposition to implementation of the initiative.

Mapai cabinet members did not adopt a uniform position; many disagreed with Ben Gurion. Numerous Jewish organizations were amazed at his vehement objections. Justice Dr. Joseph Lamm, a Bnei Brith official, stressed that despite its differences with Jabotinsky, "our order [i.e., Bnei Brith] has decided to do everything possible to return his remains." Lamm argued that the act was necessary because Israeli society stood before "fragmentation on the basis of animosity and hatred." Lamm also noted

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<sup>117</sup> *Maariv*, 26 July 1957. (Hebrew)

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*



that he viewed the return of Jabotinsky's body as "a major factor capable of unifying the populace."<sup>119</sup>

The pages of *Davar* became filled with articles and letters from Mapai members and supporters who objected not only to Ben Gurion's position, but more, they objected to his attempt to shape collective memory, an act that, in this case, was perceived as divorced from public opinion:

It is doubtful if an objective historian will determine his rightful place...In Soviet historiography, [such a position] is acceptable because the future is perceived as certainty and it is possible to change only the past. It is even possible to rewrite the history of the Bolshevik Revolution in a way that erases Trotsky, Bukharin, Zenoviev from its pages...One can improve the Soviet encyclopedia by tearing out the entry (even if it were a dubious entry) about Beria and replacing it with a full page on the Bering Sea. In a free country, in a nation that is not based on the dialectic approach toward absolute and relative truth, those who deviate from the party line will not remain anonymous, for if they do not contribution directly to the progress of our enterprise, they do so indirectly.<sup>120</sup>

In 1956, Ben Gurion wrote to Jabotinsky's assistant, Joseph Shectman: "I would like to express my opinion...[that] the remains of only two Jews are to be brought to Israel: those of Dr. Herzl and those of Baron Edmond de Rothschild. Israel needs living men, not dead corpses...."<sup>121</sup> The Prime Minister posted a similar response to Israel's President, Yitzhak Ben Zvi: Even the formal head of the State was unable to shift Ben Gurion one iota, whether the source of this attitude was consuming political competition with the deceased Revisionist leader, or resulted from rational political interests.

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<sup>119</sup> *Herut*, 22 July 1963. (Hebrew)

<sup>120</sup> Yehuda, Y., 10 November 1963, *Davar*. (Hebrew)

<sup>121</sup> *Maariv*, 26 July 1956. (Hebrew)

Ben Gurion's objections remained personal and isolated. No other leading member of Mapai shared his position. In the face of such obduracy, Yehuda Ben Moshe, a resident of Michmoret who was a member of the Zionist Federation and a veteran Mapai activist, chose to express his own opinion in one of the national newspapers: "My conscience demands that I disagree with David Ben Gurion's attitude [even though] I continue to totally object in principle to the majority of Herut's political and social policies." The author stressed that "like many other citizens of this country," he:

...respects and appreciates...one of the greatest and most devoted leaders of the Zionist Movement in the pre-State era despite his incorrect and regrettable position with respect to the Zionist Labor Movement...I believe that the government of Israel is obliged to return the remains of Zeev Jabotinsky to his country with no further delay and to conduct a funeral appropriate to the man and to the public figure who faithfully served his people throughout his life.

Moreover, the author continues, such an act would serve party and national interests because:

...our party's status as the leading party [in Israel]...makes many demands upon us to enter into all spheres of national life while it bans any expression of partiality or retribution for wrongful past events, certainly not those based on formalistic arguments about 'bringing living Jews and not corpses to the country.' Our country will rise (or, heaven forbid, fall)...according to the degree of our internal solidarity, which requires us to respect each other's opinions (despite all the valid political contradictions), especially when it comes to honoring the memory of a great Zionist leader who passed away on alien soil.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ben Moshe, Y., 9 August 1957, *Maariv*, *Letter to the Editor*. (Hebrew)

Ben Gurion's resolve regarding this issue appears similar to his objection to leave the Altalena on the Tel Aviv sandbar. It was clear that return of the remains of the father of the Revisionist Movement would ensconce Jabotinsky within the national pantheon, an act that would entail state legitimization of his person, movement and followers. It was expected to result in a profusion of ceremonies held in his memory, pilgrimages to his grave, and demands by a wide audience that his tomb be transformed into an official site among the tombs of the nation's other notables. Ben Gurion's resolve to prevent the body's return expressed more than a simple objection to the act: It expressed the attempt to suppress access to the means of social communication and one of its major symbolic instruments, national rituals. Ben Gurion, as we shall see, preferred to monopolize determination of the nation's heroes, the leaders to be interred in the state cemetery on Mount Herzl, and the figures future generations would remember as major contributors to the Israel's independence project.

Begin, as the leader of Herut, was left with no choice but to raise the issue of Etzel and Lehi heroes on the public agenda in the form of references introduced into his Knesset speeches, yet he remained unable to obtain the desired formal state response:

Let us...raise this issue, which is sacred to our armed forces, if you will allow me to first pay my respects to the national hero, who conferred his spirit on all the fighting sons of our generation, I refer to Shlomo Ben Yosef, the first of our generation to be executed while under British rule, today being the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his execution by hanging in the Acre Fortress.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Begin, M. 19 June 1958. Proposed Item for the Remembrance Day Agenda, No. 2. Regarding the Appearance of Regular Army Officers at Political Party Gatherings, *Knesset Protocols*.



Only after Herut had obtained some influence on state decorations policy would Ben Yosef be permitted to enter Israel's pantheon for his deeds.<sup>124</sup>

### **Parallel Practices**

Herut realized that military parades and other events staged by the Hagana Veterans Association were all awarded official recognition whereas their own commemorative services were denied such official recognition. They therefore turned to other options that they hoped would facilitate entry into the nation's collective memory. For instance, after it was known that Ben Gurion had denied their members – excluding Jabotinsky – eligibility for the Sovereignty Medal, Shelach turned to the National Philatelic Services with the request that it issue a special postmark commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shlomo Ben Yosef's execution. The request was denied.<sup>125</sup>

Ben Gurion's decision to award the Hagana Medal and to establish the Center for the Hagana Medal within the Ministry of Defense likewise infuriated Begin. In response, Begin decided to convene the "Underground Generation," survivors of groups from Nili to Etzel and Lehi, the Revisionist parallel to the Ben Gurion's "Hagana Generation," during the 10<sup>th</sup> Independence Day celebrations, a move that resembled his decision to observe a "private" memorial day for the movement's dead. But to no avail: the right remained excluded. In a subsequent step meant to force the issue onto the public agenda, Begin organized a parade of veterans from rightist organizations to march along the streets of Tel Aviv. "Following their habits, the rulers have ignored the historical role of the underground...to battle against the perversion of history, to reveal the whole truth...Herut's Central Committee has

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<sup>124</sup> Begin, M., 14 January 1958, letter to Katznellenbogen, B., Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17\5 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>125</sup> Director of the National Philatelic Services, 14 January 1958, letter to Shelach, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17\5 - 167. (Hebrew)

decided to hold a Convention of the Underground Generation during the 1958 Passover observances to celebrate the conquest of Jaffa" wrote Uri Avneri in *HaOlam HaZeh*.

The event was transformed into a demonstration of the right's political power and opposition to Mapai's exclusionary practices. All those who had been denied access to government office, official position or inclusion within the official historiography describing the ten-year-old nation's efforts to achieve independence joined together in order to make public their contributions and demonstrate their strength as a distinctive group. "Everyone still living was there," wrote Avneri, who covered the event as a journalist.<sup>126</sup>

Resembling a meticulously planned military parade in form, thousands marched in carefully formed groups from Mograbi Square to the Tel Aviv seashore. Each unit carried signs bearing its name. Because the underground had been banned from the *Yizkor* commemorative volumes and official historiography, the public became exposed for the first time to its activities: "Sentenced to Death," "Members of the Etzel's Fighting Units, "Jaffa's Conquerors," "Imprisoned or Detained," "the Bethlehem Prisoners" (the underground's female members and wives of fighters imprisoned by the British), "Members of the Jewish Brigade," surviving members of Nili, and others. References to Nili were reinforced by the presence of Rivka, the younger sister of Sarah and Aharon Aharonsohn. At the head of the parade marched Menachem Begin, surrounded by a hand-picked entourage: At his right, in addition to the Mayor of Tel Aviv, Chaim Levanon, marched Jacques Sustelle, a member of the French parliament who was then serving as Governor of Algeria. Sustelle blessed the gathering in the name of the French underground. The large crowd waved the flags of

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<sup>126</sup> *HaOlam HaZeh*, 16 April 1958. (Hebrew)

both countries while children threw flowers, with everyone shouting "Vive la France!"<sup>127</sup>

The presence of the Governor of Algeria was meant to bolster Herut's position from which they viewed the war against the British not only as a war of resistance but also a war of national independence. Begin and Sustelle addressed the audience on Israeli-French relations and stressed the identity between the underground's war against the British and France's war against Arab imperialism in Algeria.

The parade continued along Allenby Street, then turned toward Jaffa. The choice of Jaffa as the terminating point was not accidental. For the underground as for Herut, Jaffa had become a memory site and locus of political confrontation. Although absent from the official historiography, for them, the conquest of Jaffa continued to signify their role in the nation's liberation. Hence, the parade marched through streets where battles had been fought. "They gave something to the birth of the state; in response to the rising wave of [intentional] forgetfulness, they wanted to openly say as much," concluded Avneri.<sup>128</sup>

The event's peak, at the parade's conclusion at the large open field in Jaffa, involved a ceremony for the award of medals. These decorations were considered to be superfluous because the participants believed that they deserved the State's Sovereignty Medal. Like the preceding examples, this private ceremony closely resembled the State's version. The medal awarded was entitled the *Rishonim Medal* ("Forefathers"), and given to the ideological leaders of the movement: Abba Achimeir,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.



Yermiyahu Halperin, Mrs. Jabotinsky Kopp, Aharon Props, and Joseph Klausner. David Raziell's father pinned the medal on the Menachem Begin."<sup>129</sup>

### Appropriation of Bereavement

#### **Bereaved Parents**

The national sovereignty project did not bypass the family of the bereaved. Living heroes were not the only ones viewed as deserving of senior posts, social status, and political power: The community through which the State remained in touch with the dead — the bereaved, especially parents — likewise acquired a role in the formation of Israeli public opinion, production of a statist culture and preservation of Mapai hegemony.

In effect, from the earliest days of the State, bereavement had been identified as an arena available for appropriation to the benefit of political goals.<sup>130</sup> Bereaved parents, particularly mothers, were quickly identified by Ben Gurion as a special group, which he entitled *the family of the bereaved* so as to signify their assigned role: reproduction of the socio-political order. Among other functions, this role guaranteed the social status of professional soldiers, stressed collectivist nationalist values, and sustained commitment to enlistment among the younger generation. At the same time, it supported and legitimated the military and political actions already initiated.<sup>131</sup> In addition, appropriation of the dead, as will be shown, vindicated Mapai's and Ben Gurion's assumption of exclusive responsibility for the success of the nation-building enterprise.

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<sup>129</sup> Shelach, undated, internal report to its members, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 7\8 - 167. (Hebrew)

<sup>130</sup> Lebel, U. 1998, *The Politicization of Bereavement*, unpublished MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, Department of Political Science. (Hebrew)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Parallel to the sanctification of fallen soldiers and their transformation into role models for future generations, parents were also recruited. They were treated as agents assigned the task of encouraging their children toward self-sacrifice, the search for the common good, and dedication to the evolving State. This attitude was so ingrained in the minds of several of the country's leaders at the time that it inspired some bizarre proposals. In 1949, the Knesset Committee for National Emblems suggested awarding a "Bereaved Parents Medal" to parents of soldiers who had fallen between 30 November 1947 and 20 July 1949 (the date of the cease-fire agreement signed between Israel and Syria). The suggestion entailed awarding a bronze medal to parents who had lost one child, a silver medal to parents who had lost two children, and a gold medal to those who had lost three or more children, accompanied by a certificate on behalf of the President of the country and personally signed by Ben Gurion.<sup>132</sup> General Moshe Zadok, head of the IDF personnel division, supported the idea. Although the certificate was issued, the medals were never produced or awarded.

For their willingness to act as political agents, bereaved parents were rewarded by the State: official commemoration elevated their sons to the status of mythic heroes. "Their images will stand before us and glow even after the last of our generation passes on" wrote a Ben Gurion touched after receiving *Kinneret: Days of Defiance*,<sup>133</sup> a book containing texts written by fallen members of the Kinneret Settlement who had fought the Arabs during the War of Independence.<sup>134</sup> The term "hero" became attached to the names of the dead in popular speech. The phrase "How are the mighty fallen" (*II Samuel* 1, 25) linked the present to the past and came to

<sup>132</sup> Tzadok, Gen. M., 20 August 1949, letter to the Chief of the General Staff, IDF Archives, unnumbered. (Hebrew)

<sup>133</sup> Habas, B. (ed.), *Kinneret: Days of Defiance*, 1950. Tel Aviv: Kinneret Settlement Publications and Davar Press. (Hebrew)

<sup>134</sup> *Armor—the Journal of the Armored Division Association*, 2000, 9, p. 3. (Hebrew)

represent the epitome of public grief. Dying in battle became viewed as the resurrection of an ancient tradition. At one of its first meetings, the Public Council for Commemoration agreed to demand of the Minister of Defense that "IDF fallen officially be called 'Heroes of the War for National Sovereignty.'"<sup>135</sup> Such a step would symbolically equate Hagana with IDF dead. In response, the Ministry's Legal Counsel stated that special legislation was not required because the government was authorized to make such decisions independently. Albeit government failure to issue the title, it did acquire in a semi-official status. In official correspondence regarding the annual award of medals to bereaved families, the Prime Minister referred to the recipients as "Heroes of National Independence," "Heroes of War for National Sovereignty," or "Heroes of Israel".

In this way, the government awarded special recognition to bereaved parents in its official publications and state rituals. Parents, like their children, were declared to be unique and meaningful contributors to the sovereignty project:

Today, Israel, trembling with pride and gratitude, recalls its sons and daughters, the nation's heroes, who exposed themselves to mortal danger during battle, and who, in the glorious spring of their pure and courageous lives, obtained independence for their people. Israel will bless their memory while it is itself blessed by their valor, and loyally comforts their parents by acknowledging their sacrifice.<sup>136</sup>

During construction of the family of the bereaved, it was Ben Gurion who, more than any other public figure, remained in personal touch with the families. He wrote the foreword for many of the commemorative volumes published by bereaved

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<sup>135</sup> Dekel, Y. and Ben Zvi, Y., 21 February 1951, letter to Ben Gurion, D. containing report of decisions made during the meeting of Public Council for Commemoration, IDF Archives, unnumbered. (Hebrew)

<sup>136</sup> *Proclamation Regarding the Nation's First Independence Day*, cited in Azaryahu, 1995.



families, spoke at numerous commemorative services, and frequently responded, in his own handwriting, to the letters sent him by members of these families:

...beyond the images of the boys and girls radiates the image of the parents. These wonderful young lions of Judah were not born of its granite and oaks. These lions and lionesses had parents, virtuous women and honorable men...dear parents who bequeathed their children to the coming generations and to their people.<sup>137</sup>

As stated, bereaved mothers were singled out. In an address whose subject was the role of parents in the education for sacrifice and patriotism, Ben Gurion stated:

Perhaps fathers have a part [in the process]...but I am convinced that a much larger part, perhaps the main part, belongs to mothers. We have been blessed with mothers who have given us boys and girls who are the pride of their generation. It is they who will educate the future generations; it is their image that will burn like a pillar of fire before those same generations. I am aware of my incapacity to console a mother who has lost her precious child. However, it appears to me that the Jewish mother who educated her children in this spirit will not only know grief over her loss; she will also feel pride, justifiable pride, for the gift she has given her people at what may be their greatest moment in history...She will feel not only pain and sorrow but also satisfaction because she gave such children to her people, children who have left us...but especially their mothers, their mothers.<sup>138</sup>

In translating this policy into a program, bereaved parents became regular invitees to state ceremonies, speakers at public gatherings, colleagues of national leaders on the reviewer's platform at military parades and state events. At the first Defense Forces Day celebration in 1949, which included the first military parade held

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<sup>137</sup> Cited in Talmi, E. (ed.), 1952, *Israel during the War*. Tel Aviv: Amichai. (Hebrew)

<sup>138</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 28 September 1961, address given at the party conference announcing publication of the third volume of *Gvilei Esh* (*Parchments of Fire*); cited in R. Avinoam (ed.), 1961, *Memorial Pages*, Tel Aviv: Am HaSefer. (Hebrew)

in the fledgling state, the central stage was planned to seat 1600 people. Each place was marked with the names of those invited. In the center, a special box was prepared for President Ben Zvi and his retinue, Ben Gurion and Chief of the General Staff Dori. To the left, a section was assigned to the diplomatic corps, behind which would be seated cabinet ministers, members of the Knesset, heads of local governments, the senior civil service and senior army officers. To the left, another platform was constructed to seat 800 disabled veterans; in front of the central stage and at both sides of the field where the parade would be held were other platforms, arranged in a horseshoe pattern, where bereaved parents would sit. Bereaved parents were also selected – for some, the absence of the parents of Etzel and Lehi dead was glaring.<sup>139</sup> In contrast, the parents of Hagana dead were not only invited, they arrived to find seats assigned to them on the specially arranged platforms.<sup>140</sup>

Ben Gurion was not content, however, to differentiate between “acceptable” and “unacceptable” or “invisible,” excluded parents. He also selected parents who could symbolize the type of bereavement that served national purposes, who could represent and help construct the spirit of the time. These parents became, on occasion, partners in the practice of politics, figures acquiring direct access to the Mapai leadership. A prime example of this phenomenon was Rivka Guber.

Rivka Guber was perhaps the ideal woman to represent Labor Movement ideals and recruited bereavement. After Guber's husband Mordechai was rejected by the British Army in 1942 on account of poor health, she became the first woman inducted into the British Army's Auxiliary Training Service (ATS). Her decision to

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<sup>139</sup> *Haaretz*, 19 July 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>140</sup> Dresner, Y., October 2001, interview, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Tel Aviv. (Hebrew)

leave her two small sons at home and join the male war effort shattered all the norms of protective Jewish motherhood and made her a controversial figure. Convinced that her entire family should take part in the Yishuv's contribution to the War effort, she served for two years, until her son Efraim reached the age of 16. She then helped forge documents verifying his age; Efraim then replaced her as the family's representative in the army. Efraim served as a Guardian (*noter*) in the Hagana for about six months, after which he joined the Jewish Brigade. "When I received your letter after the battle, I cried from happiness" responded Rivka to her son now stationed in Europe, "not only because you have survived but also because I have been blessed with the type of son I dreamt about. My heart, like yours, betrays no timidity."<sup>141</sup>

On 26 March 1948, while Efraim was commanding a Hagana convoy escort unit near Kfar Uriah, the Arabs attacked the isolated Tirat Shalom. While covering the settlement, he was caught by a bullet and killed. The sorrow that fell upon the couple did nothing to weaken their determination regarding the family's part in the Yishuv's collective effort against the Arabs. On 28 June 1948, Efraim's brother Zvi joined the Palmach. Three weeks later, on 8 July, Zvi was killed in the battle at Hulikat in northern Israel. His body was found only some months after he died.

In 1955, now past the age of 60, the Gubers decided to leave their original home in Kfar Warburg and settle in the Lachish region. Lachish had become the site of concerted development efforts, concentrating on founding new communities and absorbing immigrants (*aliyah*), national projects that the government had signaled out as particularly urgent. The Gubers settled in Noga, the first settlement established in the area. They lived in a small wooden shack, without electricity or running water, and became active in the community's development. From there they moved to Nehura,

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<sup>141</sup> *HaDoar*, 30 June 1972. (Hebrew)



the first rural regional center to be established in the Negev, following donation of their farm at Kfar Warburg to the National Fund. Mordechai Guber became head of the local council while Rivka became involved in early childhood education and spurred establishment of libraries in the surrounding settlements. Their activity continued into 1967, when they moved once more, this time to Kfar Achim ("brothers"), a settlement named after their sons, where they worked for the absorption of immigrants from Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Rivka Guber embodied the spirit of the Labor Movement as it was physically expressed in the monuments scattered throughout the country.<sup>142</sup> She would often verbalize the core values of the Hagana – national defense, pioneering, and settlement – which came to represent the core values of Israel's collectivist ideology:

Our unique situation demanded that we perceive life's meaning as a mission...there was no need for us to search for goals: The massive wave of immigration, which swelled and engulfed us, was like spring rain...this awareness and the circumstances provided [Mordechai] with the opportunity to do what he did in order to establish dozens of immigrant settlements — and I was there to help him, as much as I could....<sup>143</sup>

Given her activities and beliefs, she became an exemplar in the campaign to recruit the masses to Mapai-directed national projects:

Ingathering of the exiles [*kibbutz galuyot*] is the supreme goal of the State of Israel...including the kibbutzim where the pioneering spirit was satisfied with attempts to absorb small groups of minorities but betrayed no concern for the masses of immigrants, nor for the immigrants who had settled on the land. The entire nation was thirsty for immigration and prayed for its arrival...but outside state institutions...only a smattering of citizens, such as the brothers

<sup>142</sup> For instance, the Hulda and Negba monuments; see Part II, Chapter Two.

<sup>143</sup> Guber, R., 1970, *Being Worthy*, address given at the twentieth anniversary celebration of the publication of her book, *The Brothers Book*, Beit Hasofer Archives, Tel Aviv.

Yaakov and Zvi Maimon, and Rivka and Mordechai Guber, actively displayed any comradeship with the immigrants....<sup>144</sup>

From Ben Gurion's the point of view, Rivka Guber was the optimal Mapai/Labor Movement mother. At the cornerstone laying ceremony for the Soldiers' Commemoration Building at Kfar Vitkin (1951), Ben Gurion mentioned *The Brothers Book*, written by Guber, and stated that

among the special things about this book is...the image of the mother who glows from its pages. The mother's words will stand as a symbol of the Jewish mother's courage and loyalty. She was able to speak for many of Israel's mothers. The nation will remember her sons...and the parents who raised them [to serve] the nation with love and respect.<sup>145</sup>

Ben Gurion's attitude toward *The Brothers Book*,<sup>146</sup> in which Guber recounts the history of her sons' short lives and their readiness to volunteer and to do battle, transformed the book into a canonical text, an inspirational tome of the first order. Immediately after reading the book, Ben Gurion asked to meet its author.<sup>147</sup> A long-lasting relationship followed. He described Rivka Guber as follows: "I am acquainted with no other mother in Israel — either now or in any other generation — such as the mother of these two boys. Her work is an incomparable chapter in world literature." The sobriquet "the boys' mother," attached to Guber's name until her death, reflected her status as a paragon to be emulated especially by bereaved parents. "From the

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<sup>144</sup>Ben Gurion, D., 26 January 1964, *Introduction* to the *Yizkor* volume dedicated to Varda Friedman, a volunteer working in an immigrant moshav, killed by Arabs, Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>145</sup>*Davar*, 26 March 1951. (Hebrew)

<sup>146</sup>Guber, R., 1950. *The Brothers Book*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)

<sup>147</sup>*Maariv*, 29 April 1966. (Hebrew)

moment I read your words in *The Brothers Book*, I realized that a great mother had been born in Israel...With mothers like you, we can confidently await the future."<sup>148</sup>

Guber accepted the role, fully conscious of the obligations involved with being a living symbol:

The biblical mother after whom I was named took upon herself a weighty responsibility for future generations...Throughout our [people's] bitter exile, and until this very day, the Jewish mother was the symbol of home and country for her sons. She guarded tradition so that her people's hopes would not die...suffering did not demean her, it only exalted her. I feel that this is the place and the time to remember a little-known Jewish mother, one of the many who died in the Warsaw Ghetto after all her sons had been killed before her very eyes. This mother, Esther Zacks, has become for many the mother of all Holocaust victims...due to a letter she wrote to her children: 'After the pogrom, your father said to me: Don't worry, Hitler doesn't have the power to destroy us — we have a son in the Land of Israel.' The greatest Jewish mother of our times is Henrietta Szold<sup>149</sup>; she has succored myriads of oppressed Jews, uprooted from their native soil and replanted in our homeland. Permit me to recall but another mother, a purely imaginary one...a poet dedicated this image to all the mothers whose sons fell in the campaign [against the Arabs]...This youth had seen the best of the younger generation...fall upon the homeland's fields...including his elder brother...Thousands of bereaved mothers were forced to dry their tears [in pride] for this is how we have educated our sons.<sup>150</sup>

For Labor supporters, Guber became the voice of the fallen soldiers' parents. Whenever possible, Ben Gurion presented her as the "State mother," an honor she attempted to realize. In return, she came to call Ben Gurion the *Champion of Israeli*

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<sup>148</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 13 December 1953, letter to Guber, R., Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, 10\1a. (Hebrew)

<sup>149</sup> A leading educator.

<sup>150</sup> Labor Party Archives, undated, 95\32\36. (Hebrew)



*Sovereignty*.<sup>151</sup> She became a permanent fixture in commemorative ceremonies. During the 1951 Independence Day festivities, the Chief of the General Staff's address to bereaved parents was transmitted over the radio; Rivka Guber spoke next. At the end of the transmission, the leading actress of the day, Hannah Rovina, read excerpts from the writings of fallen soldiers.<sup>152</sup> On these and other such occasions, the Gubers were invited to the rostrum as honorary guests and public figures.

### **Gelbgisser**

The story of the Gelbgisser family, which paralleled that of the Guber family, could easily have become a national myth to be learnt by Israel's youth for generations. The plot involved the loss of their two sons — the twins Shlomo and Menachem — during the War of Independence, participation in settlement, belief in patriotic values and steadfast Zionist practice. The Gelbgissers had come to Israel from Eastern Europe and gone to join other pioneering farmers in Mishmar Hayarden. In 1929, they turned to raising strawberries, then a new crop, in what was to become the city of Givatayim, in the proximity of Tel Aviv. Three of their children joined the British Army in 1940. Shlomo and Menachem served in the Jewish Brigade, where they assisted in the rescue of refugee children in Europe. Volumes of letters, written by the two brothers to their siblings, remained with the family. The letters describe how the brothers visited orphanages and monasteries in Italy, Belgium and Holland, searching everywhere for Jewish children who had managed to survive. The rescued children occasionally wrote emotional letters to the family as well as newspaper articles describing their experiences. Gradually, the brothers' political views came to approach

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<sup>151</sup> Guber, R. letter to Ben Gurion, Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, unnumbered. (Hebrew)

<sup>152</sup> *Davar*, 9 May 1951. (Hebrew)

those of Etzel, which they eventually joined. Both participated in the conquest of Jaffa. Shlomo, who joined Etzel after completing his tour of duty with the Brigade, participated in the Yehudia campaign and fell on 19 May 1948, five days after declaration of statehood, during the attack on Wilhelma. The attack, although officially an Etzel operation, was conducted in coordination with IDF forces. Menachem had joined the IDF after its absorption of Etzel forces.

As the father of three soldiers in the field, the elder Gelbgisser could have prevented Menachem's induction into the army and demanded that he not be put on active duty. He did in fact do so but rescinded his objection when Shlomo was killed: "I would like to cancel the appeal I presented regarding the release from mandatory induction of my fourth son [Menachem]. After one of my three sons, already serving in the army, was killed yesterday, my fourth son must take his place."<sup>153</sup> Gelbgisser thus brought about a situation where his three remaining sons were all concurrently fighting against the invading Arab armies. During the Altalena incident, Menachem deserted his unit and returned home: He had found it difficult to fire upon his ideological brothers stationed on the ship. With the incident's conclusion, he returned to the IDF and was assigned to the 53rd Regiment, the Golani Brigade, and stationed at Kibbutz Geva. He was killed on 13 July 1948 while fending off the Egyptian attack on the kibbutz. According to a fellow soldier assigned to his position, Menachem's last words were: "My brother is calling me." After his death, his mother expressed the hope that the death of her sons had contributed to the State's rebirth, and that they "were not needless victims."

In the absence of any official State mandate to commemorate Etzel dead – as opposed to Hagana dead – commemoration became a personal and local government

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<sup>153</sup> Gelbgisser, Y. Letter to the IDF Appeals Committee, private correspondence. (Hebrew)

project. Six years after the deaths of the Gelbgisser brothers, several Etzel veterans decided to end the public silence surrounding their story and to erect a synagogue in their memory on a plot owned by their parents in Givatayim. The name chosen for the synagogue was "The SM Tabernacle," including the initials of the two brothers' names, S(hlomo) and M(enachem). In letters addressed to veterans of the dissident movements, pleas were made for financial contributions.<sup>154</sup>

On 7 July 1954, on the anniversary of Menachem's death, a groundbreaking ceremony was held at the plot. *Herut* advertised the event in its newspaper. The ceremony was staged as an *Herut* Movement gathering. None of the senior government officials invited to participate and address the audience arrived; invited representatives of the Ministry of Defense also failed to appear. Menachem Begin was the sole public figure present. Thus, despite the Gelbgissers' hopes that the ceremony would result in State recognition of their sons' deeds, they were awarded with official disregard. Comments made by the Rabbi of the Givat Rambam district of Givatayim to Yaakov, the elder Gelbgisser — "Your sons'...dream will not be fulfilled until the Land of Israel extends over both banks of the Jordan River...[I pray] that this liberation is soon completed"<sup>155</sup> — irrevocably marked the ceremony as a political event irrespective of its original intent. Similar to Mapai's policy regarding such events, *Herut* had appropriated commemoration to its ideological needs and transformed the Gelbgisser ceremony into an instrument in its withdrawal from any attempt to enter the statist discourse.

The Gelbgisser commemoration ceremony, irrespective of its scale, was therefore but one in a series of similar events exploited for political purposes. In the

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<sup>154</sup> Shelach, 28 June 1954, invitation to the ceremony. (Hebrew)

<sup>155</sup> *Herut*, 8 July 1954. (Hebrew)



press report of the commemorative service for the dead from the Acre Fortress break-in, conducted at Moshav Shavei Tziyyon, the article published in *HaOlam HaZeh* noted that:

this is a private service for private heroes. While the martyrs' families weep for their sons, Menachem Begin and several leaders of the Herut Movement honor the dead who fell in the service of the organization that he [Begin] commanded." The author then notes the fact that "the cemetery at Shavei Tziyyon...was established almost by chance...The original plan had been to bury them in Nahariya, but the Nahariya municipality feared all contact with the underground, even after death. Shavei Tziyyon eventually responded to their request to set aside space for their final resting place. Not one Israeli government official has yet visited this or other [Etzel and Lehi] cemetery."<sup>156</sup>

The bereaved families, bereft of any government support, were dependent exclusively on Shelach and private contributions in their efforts to commemorate their dead:

They abandoned us. Parents. Brothers and sisters. Hurting and mourning. The State was born. Jewish policemen walk its streets. Jewish servicemen strut in parades on Independence Day. And we, the parents of these freedom fighters, are left uninvited to the honorary rostrum to sit among other bereaved parents for the sake of those who, like them, were anonymous soldiers in their war against the British oppressor. Today, we are indeed invisible parents, unknown bereaved parents. But the State exists nonetheless. That is our sole consolation for the loss of our two precious sons.<sup>157</sup>

In the face of the public recognition awarded to Mapai's bereaved mothers and its non-recognition of the bereaved mothers of those dead identified with the

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<sup>156</sup> *HaOlam HaZeh*, 8 April 1958. (Hebrew)

<sup>157</sup> From address made by the parents of the Ribenbach brothers, killed during the Haifa Railroad Workshops attack, cited by the Association for the Commemoration of Lehi Martyrs, Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 539 - 55. (Hebrew)

underground, many women associated with Etzel became embittered as they were repeatedly shunted into a corner of the public arena. They were thus obliged to construct a private culture of mourning and commemoration in order to state their claims in the nation-building project. For instance, the third verse of the Lehi anthem *Unknown Soldiers*, written by the organization's founder, Yair (Avraham) Stern, cites:

the tears of mothers bereaved of their young,  
sacred infants...  
We'll cement the bricks of our bodies for walls  
And our homeland will surely be built.<sup>158</sup>

The feelings of mothers belonging to the dissident camp were poignantly expressed in the bequest of Ziporah Gurion, the mother of three daughters who had served in Etzel and the wife of Yitzhak Gurion, also an Etzel member. Her husband and daughters were arrested numerous times prior to independence. During her battle against cancer, Gurion wrote a will that was entrusted to Esther Raziell-Naor (MK, Herut). The will, opened after her death in 1957, read:

...I remember the nights of turmoil and days of war and rebellion...[what] I knew from my own experience and from the suffering faces of the mothers and wives of members of the underground...I made a decision. I said to myself, only the body deteriorates and passes away, the spirit is eternal...I would like a special fund to be established as part of the Museum of the Underground located in the Jabotinsky Institute for the collection of all the material on the roles played, operations conducted, the vision and execution of national liberation, the acts of defiance committed by women in the Diaspora and in Tziyyon...The fund will provide all the means necessary for the collection of these documents, which will provide the foundations for an encyclopedia in which the memories of all the women will be entrusted. [We will thereby

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<sup>158</sup> See <http://www.saveisrael.com/sternsoldiers.htm>.

learn] ...to appreciate their character and quality, their contributions and actions...of those forgotten whether by choice or by accident....<sup>159</sup>

After her death, her family began to implement her wishes. A public committee was formed of the underground's veterans and their wives, and collection of the material was begun. This project paralleled the State's commemorative literature project. Each had a similar political purpose – to impress the image of the bereaved mothers whose children were sacrificed on the altar of national rebirth into Israel's collective memory.

However, in the face of the "counter-efforts" to commemorate these "private heroes," as the press described them, Menachem Begin surprisingly presented a public-spirited approach in everything related to public commemoration of the nation's dead. At the opening of the inaugural meeting of Herut's National Convention, Begin outlined the difference between his approach and that of Ben Gurion:

We will recall more than our sons this evening...have no intention of discriminating between our undertaking and other Jewish undertakings...we will also remember those Hagana dead...who fought shoulder-to-shoulder with us against the British oppressor...who fell while defending their country and their people at the hands of the British henchmen, the Arab bands. We will remember them all, whether they belonged to the Hagana, to Etzel or to Lehi, or to no one organization, who united as Israel's forces and who fought and fell...they are all sacred, they are all heroes...we will remember them all with love. In honor of them all, we will rise in a moment of silence.<sup>160</sup>

One wonders what might have motivated Begin's magnanimous attitude, considering the acrimony between the two sides regarding the historical narrative.

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<sup>159</sup> *HaOlam HaZeh*, 20 February 1952. (Hebrew)

<sup>160</sup> *Herut*, 20 October 1948. (Hebrew)



### **Ben Gurion's War**

During the Knesset debate in which Begin had complained that Dayan, while a senior IDF officer, had taken part in a Mapai gathering and called upon the nation's young people to join the party's youth movement, Ben Gurion denied the legitimacy of criticizing "individuals who had participated in the war for national sovereignty by someone who had not participated in [that war]."<sup>161</sup>

Begin's accusation prefaced a no-confidence vote against the government on 24 June 1958. His argument was not against an act that had nullified the separation between the political and the military spheres but against what he contended was a contrary definition of historical truth and the character of the struggle that had culminated in establishment of the State. Was that conflict a sovereignty project as claimed by Ben Gurion and Mapai, or a war of liberation as claimed by himself and the underground, now under the Herut umbrella?

Begin's Knesset remarks are revealing in the structure of the argument and the personal antipathy betrayed:

...From the dawn of their youth, individuals must of necessity dedicate their lives to their people and their country...they sacrifice their bodies in the concentration camps and on the scaffold; they endanger their souls by day and by night to leave their families, to conduct campaigns on more than one front — a war of the few against the many...and to remember — if not brought before the executioner — the land of their dreams. To hear such things [Ben Gurion's remarks] from the podium of a Jewish parliament, and from the mouth of one of its members...But there is no place for sadness or for argument. It is not beneath my dignity — although it was beneath the dignity of

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<sup>161</sup> Begin, M. 19 June 1958, *Proposal for the Agenda, Proposal No. 2* (following the proposal for a memorial day law): *The appearance of regular army officers at political party gatherings, Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

the youngest of my thousands of past subordinates in Israel's campaigns of resistance and liberation – to argue about the subject of the war of national sovereignty with a person who claimed ...before the Conscription Committee that Zionism never intended...to create a Jewish state [a sovereign state in Ben Gurion's terms]...He was willing to determine what Zionism entails — during those days when the best of Jewish youth stood in the midst of the life-or-death war against foreign rule, for the sake of national independence, and to declare: 'If the British regime and gendarmes are interested in the elimination of terror, we will cooperate to that same degree' — and to abide by what he declared, to cooperate and to turn hundreds of freedom fighters over to the British, and to continue in that same shameful act against which our ancient forefathers would have uttered additional prayers...There is no argument. History will judge who endangered his life for so many years, and who did not do so for even one day; who was hunted by multitudes of soldiers and police yet did not leave the country for even one day...Who incited hate, malice, plots, civil war, the shedding of innocent blood — to the point of a vindictiveness that no human words can describe, vindictiveness beyond death — [as opposed to] who prevented civil war at all cost...with so much love and understanding...who recognized every right and its possessor, every sacrifice and those who sacrificed. History will judge. You are too insignificant, Mr. Ben Gurion, to argue with us over the war of national sovereignty — too petty and too narrow-minded. There is no argument over the war of national sovereignty, but we can argue over the status of the Jewish armed forces...[of those who] tied their fates to Jabotinsky's movement in the last elections. Are you trying to identify the Israeli armed forces with Mapai?<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Begin, M., 13 December 1954, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

## Chapter Five

### The Politics of Historiography

Little doubt exists as to the significance of Israel's War of Independence for the period covered by this research. The event, one and a half years in duration, provided the main content and symbolic thrust to Israeli culture. Poetry and literature were dedicated to the subject, commemorative sites provided major targets for artistic expression, school texts and educational activities focused on its narrative. As part of the program to convert the War into an educational value, a national essay competition was held for high school students in 1953 on the subject the "War of Independence."<sup>1</sup> The prizes were awarded at a special ceremony held in Jerusalem on *Lag ba'Omer*, the holiday celebrating the Jewish insurrection against Imperial Rome. Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, the wife of Israel's President and a leading personality in her own right, handed the awards to the winners.

Like the rest of the population, students' perceptions of the War and their attitudes toward it were not necessarily the products of spontaneous recollection. With the establishment of the State in 1948, the national leadership initiated a series of literary and historical projects to document and recreate the story of Israel's rebirth. Historiography, authorized and unauthorized alike, whether written as war diaries, historical works, literary collections, poetry, or letters from the front, were loyal to the official interpretative package decreed by Mapai. Although attempts were made to

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<sup>1</sup> Peres, S., 30 April 1953, letter to Y. Dekel, Y., IDF Archives, 156-90/72. (Hebrew)



present alternative versions of the past so as to broaden public appreciation of the events and the contributions made by participants excluded from these texts, time, as Azaryahu reveals, worked in favor of the authorized version.<sup>2</sup> The examples to be described in this chapter illustrate how historiography reflected the hegemonic control of Mapai, the dominant party in power at the conclusion of the War but more particularly, Ben Gurion's desire to stamp his mark on the nation's collective memory. This was accomplished by means of selective remembrance of the "facts" realized through recruited historiography written about the events. The events cited here are limited to the military arena because of the political implications of the War of Independence and nation building.

The guiding force behind the authorized historiography project was David Ben Gurion. He quickly grasped the political salience of writing and distributing his own version of the struggle for independence. By 1963, after retiring from government and secluding himself at Sde Boker, Ben Gurion turned to writing his memoirs. This man, who had served as General Secretary of the Histadrut, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, was acutely aware of his personal role in the State's rebirth and its maturation. He claimed at the time that writing his memoirs was more important than anything he had yet done.<sup>3</sup> In effect, as Anita Shapira notes, "until establishment of the State, Ben Gurion had paid little attention to historical issues or to culture in general"; she concludes that these matters simply did not interest him.<sup>4</sup> However, once national rebirth was achieved, Ben Gurion realized

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<sup>2</sup> M. Azaryahu, 1995, *State Rites*, University of Beer Sheva, Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>3</sup> Erez, Y., quoted in Tzachor, Z., 1996, Ben Gurion the Mythmaker, in D. Ohana and S.R. Weisreich (Eds.), *Myth and Remembrance — The Evolution of Israel Consciousness*, Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and the Van Leer Institute, p. 138. (Hebrew)

<sup>4</sup> Shapira, A., 1997, *New Jews, Old Jews*, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, pp. 225-226. Shapira also notes that the first inklings of a change in view are noticeable in texts from 1951. See especially Ben Gurion, D., 1951, *The Campaign*, Tel-Aviv: Mapai Publications, pp. 197-202. (Hebrew)

the long-term political value attached to his version of the events. He subsequently invested considerable efforts in writing and distributing texts – in addition to his personal biography – that clearly informed their readers as to who was to receive credit for this achievement.

Politically, historiography represented a direct extension of the legislation aimed at distancing Etzel and Lehi dead from the national pantheon. In 1950, Ben Gurion wrote: "I refuse to grant Etzel any recognition...Although I must avoid differentiating between the Hagana and the others who worked toward the same purpose, I will not rank Etzel alongside the Hagana...." Ben Gurion identified the strategies required to inculcate his messages together with the force of culture, as resources capable of translation into political power. In 1950, he wrote the following: "The urgent tasks awaiting us include...party publication of a large quantity of material in every area of literature...organization of the Ministry of Defense, and recruitment of colleagues for the army's cultural education."<sup>5</sup>

The consummate expression of this view is Ben Gurion's decision to produce the *Sefer Toldot HaHagana* (*The Hagana Chronicles*), published by Israel's Ministry of Defense. The decision to do so provided the first opportunity to debate the developing historiography, as the right expressed its fury over an official institution's willingness to publish a seemingly non-partisan history book that nonetheless ignored the opposition's role in the War. The eighth volume of *Chronicles*, entitled *The History of the Hagana*, was released in 1973, on the eve of the Jewish New Year. The idea of publishing such a book was born among a group of Hagana veterans with the creation of the IDF at the end of 1948. Their purpose, as stated by Shaul Avigur, one

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Gurion, D., 1951, *Diaries*, entry dated 26 March 1950, University of Beer Sheva, Ben Gurion Archives (originally the Sde Boker Center). (Hebrew)



of the idea's architects, was to recount the story of Jewish defense in Israel "from Tel Hai (March 1920) to the order announcing establishment of the IDF (31 May 1948), as well as from the earliest instances of self-defense in Palestine beginning with Jewish settlement at the close of the preceding century." A further aim was to "faithfully tell the story as a gift to the IDF and its future generations, to all the nation's people and its youth."<sup>6</sup> A similar suggestion was made by a group of historians led by Prof. Ben-Zion Dinur. Both projects received the support of Ben Gurion, who created a framework to prepare the volume. It was also agreed that the book would be published jointly by the Ministry of Defense and the Zionist Federation. The project was officially announced on 17 July 1949; its editorial staff would include Shaul Avigur, Yitzchak Ben-Zvi, Ben-Zion Dinur (Dinburg), Eliezer Galili and Yisrael Galili.<sup>7</sup>

A review of the evolution of Jewish defense forces as described in the work discloses the total dearth of references to Etzel and Lehi from the volume dealing with the period of their operation. Only one organization — the Hagana — is mentioned. Avigur writes thusly: "Volume Three of the *Hagana Chronicles* unfolds the story of a period fraught with action and excitement from May 1939...until the end of 1948...At first we were convinced that our book would conclude on 29 November. However, in the course of its writing, it became clear that the Hagana continued to carry the main burden of the War of Independence until the establishment of the IDF in late May 1948."<sup>8</sup>

Following the departure of Prof. Dinur (for reasons of health) and some of his students from the project, the main responsibility for its completion was transferred to Prof. Yehuda Slutzky, who had written the major portion of the text appearing in

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<sup>6</sup> *Shadmot*, 1953, 50 (Winter), the Yad Tabenkin Archives, Section 25, Container 6, File 3. (Hebrew)

<sup>7</sup> *Davar*, 17 July 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>8</sup> *Shadmot*, 1953.



Volumes Two and Three. These describe the personal experiences of Hagana members. The introduction, again written by Avigur, reveals the reality experienced by the Hagana veterans who initiated the project: "This is not a book of military history...this is a personal historical account...We tried as best we could to make sure that comrades who participated in or witnessed the various Hagana actions would review and comment upon the text."<sup>9</sup> The text's intent was to position the Hagana as the forerunner of the Israel Defense Forces. As stated by Avigur: "We believe that whoever reads this or the previous volumes of the *Hagana Chronicles* will be convinced that the IDF is the Hagana's direct and legitimate offspring. Almost all IDF institutions were conceived in the Hagana."<sup>10</sup>

In the face of the contradictory evidence regarding the events that was brought forth by the underground's veterans, Avigur adamantly stressed Labor's version of the IDF's origins: "I believe it necessary to emphasize this point given the spreading view claiming that the IDF and the Hagana are ostensibly two distinct and separate historical entities. We are convinced that our book refutes this idea...In the years following the War of Independence, many works appeared authored by recruits of what we consider to be renegade organizations. Their aim was, among others, to obscure the central role of the Hagana in the establishment of the State. The impression gained from their letters and publications is that three underground movements were active in Palestine: the Hagana, Etzel and Lehi, each of which should be considered equal in its historical significance. I hope that our book will decisively refute this version of the circumstances surrounding the State's rebirth. I believe that every thoughtful reader will be forced to admit that the Hagana is the only

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

organization that strode along the tracks of Jewish history in recent years. The other organizations were fleeting occurrences on the pages of history."<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the ruling elite's ability to produce authorized texts "recounting" the past was its power to distribute those texts and guarantee their maximal exposure. The editors of the *Chronicles* were eager to exploit this advantage: "We are diligently working on the maximal distribution of these volume...Regarding the future, several options are available: one of these is an abridged version of our book...which will be more accessible and readable for broad segments of the population including the young...we will also begin translation of the book into other languages: English, Russian,...French, Spanish and Yiddish."<sup>12</sup> Eventually, as will be seen, the Ministry of Defense distributed this work widely, an act that renewed the controversy that surrounded its publication.

Ben Gurion's version of the War of Independence was imposed not only on authorized historiographical texts, it also infiltrated other written works, whether produced by publishers directly connected with Mapai, such as Sifriat Hapoalim, or by the Ministry of Defense and others. All betray reliance on authorized works and internalization of their messages.<sup>13</sup> As early as December 1948, Sifriat Hapoalim issued *Be'Iqvot HaChayalim (With Our Troops)*, a book containing "reports written by IDF observers and articles chronicling the War's progress." These carefully selected, edited personal recollections and correspondence were considered germane, "objective" accounts despite their chronological proximity to the events. The volume

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<sup>11</sup> *Shadmot*, 1953.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Shapira, A., 1985, *From Dismissal of the Hagana's Commander to the Dismantling of the Palmach*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew)  
*Prime Ministerial Resignations*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)

represents, in effect, the first stage in the socio-cultural production of a fixed "collective experience of the War," presumably shared by the entire population.

Subsequent literary activity substantiates this conclusion regarding post-War historiography. The majority of writers who documented the conduct of the War identified themselves with Ben Gurion. Their overwhelming reliance on his narrative prevented cross-references to texts free of Ben Gurion's direct involvement in their composition. This tendency incorporated an almost blind faith in the accuracy of the details reported by him, especially in his *Israel at War*<sup>14</sup> a book that attained exclusivity as a historical record of the pre-War period and early stages of the War. Ben Gurion's personal diaries were extensively cited in the introduction to *The History of the War of Independence*.<sup>15</sup> Although published in 1953 in response to *The Hagana Chronicles* and supposedly meant to compete with that authorized rendition of the events, the two-volume *Palmach Yearbook*<sup>16</sup> refrains from suggesting an alternative reading of the past. Shapira found that few of the details mentioned or contentions made in these volumes deviate from the authorized historiography.<sup>17</sup> Later works, although written in the 1970s after Ben Gurion's departure from public affairs, likewise strayed little from this path: consider the works by John and David Kimchi,<sup>18</sup> Yehuda Slutzky,<sup>19</sup> and Michael Bar Zohar.<sup>20</sup> With the exclusion of Begin's *The Revolt*,<sup>21</sup> the story of Israel's War of Independence remained uniform and faithful to the interpretation proffered by Mapai's leadership.

<sup>14</sup> Ben Gurion, D., 1963, *Israel at War*, Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim. (Hebrew)

<sup>15</sup> complete cite

<sup>16</sup> Gilad, Z. (Ed.), 1953, *The Palmach Yearbook*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Hebrew).

<sup>17</sup> A. Shapira, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Kimchi, J. and Kimchi, D., 1973, *On Opposite Slopes of the Hill*, Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, Maarachot. (Hebrew)

<sup>19</sup> Slutzky, Y., 1971, *A History of the Hagana*, Vol. III, Part 2, p. 1587 ff. (Hebrew)

<sup>20</sup> Bar Zohar, M., 1977, *Ben Gurion*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)

<sup>21</sup> Begin, M., 1950, *The Revolt*, Tel Aviv: Achiassaf. (Hebrew)



Ben Gurion was not content to mold the contours of the history recounted in "scholarly" texts. His incisive realization of the influence exerted by literature and the press on the public's perception of the past led him to diligently nurture fast ties with writers and intellectuals, whom he viewed as Mapai's ideological agents, to be entrusted with creating the aesthetics of the party's political dominance.<sup>22</sup> Ben Gurion unveiled his vision before this audience at a meeting held on 26 November 1948: "One hundred thousand Jews are fighting for their freedom. This, the foremost act of human creation undertaken in our time, will inspire literature and art for generations to come. This is an historical epic, written by 100,000 of the cream of our youth. All this effort is being concentrated now, and will remain targeted as long as the threat to our existence and independence exists."<sup>23</sup> This was only one of the frequent meetings he held with this community. During Israel's first decade as an independent nation-state, writers became part of what Shils terms the "charismatic locus," one of the sites of spiritual, cultural and political influence,<sup>24</sup> or what Eisenstadt calls the "social core"<sup>25</sup> They became Ben Gurion's companions and, as Zand has described it, they were engrossed by his personality. They helped Ben Gurion construct a national culture and ideological consensus while accepting the accompanying social and economic privileges; lacking the traditions of an authentic autonomous elite, they fought no intellectual battles.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lebel, U., 2002. Cracks in the Mirror of Military Hegemony: The Courts and the Media as Agents of Civil Society in Israel, in D. Korn (Ed.), *Public Policy and Administration in Israel*, Baltimore: Lexington.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Peleg, A., 1993, *The War of Independence in a Stocking Cap*, Tel Aviv: IDF, Headquarters of the Chief Education Officer Command and the *Gadna* (Youth Battalions), p. 8. (Hebrew)

<sup>24</sup> E. Shils, 1973. Intellectuals, Tradition and the Tradition of Intellectuals: Some Preliminary Considerations, in S.N. Eisenstadt and S.R. Graubard (Eds.), *Intellectuals and Tradition*, New York: Humanities Press, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N., 1973. Intellectuals and Tradition, in S.N. Eisenstadt and S.R. Graubard (Eds.), *Intellectuals and Tradition*, New York: Humanities Press, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Zand, S., 2000, *Intellectuals, Truth and Power*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, pp. 19-20. (Hebrew)

Ben Gurion did not hide his attitudes regarding the normative and political roles of another elite, the nation's reporters. During one of his speeches to senior editors and reporters, he expressed his view of media personnel: "Like teachers, journalists are educators. Teachers educate only the young; journalists educate everyone who reads a newspaper. Journalists cannot work just to support themselves...Journalism is a public service, not merely a private pursuit...The journalist is not employed by his publisher, he is employed by his public."<sup>27</sup> Government relations with the press were to remain within Ben Gurion's exclusive domain of influence for years.

In the campaign for construction of collective memory, political elites and dominant parties obviously enjoy several structural advantages: They control the media, nourish the press, and have privileged access to documents. This facilitates the relatively effective flow and distribution of political messages throughout the channels of social communication. The exclusionary outcomes of this structure can be illustrated thusly: In contrast to *Davar*, Mapai's journalistic outlet, distribution of Herut newspapers through IDF channels was prohibited. Practically speaking, this meant that no IDF education officers openly identified with the right; moreover, these officers were explicitly ordered to screen newspapers and written material prior to their distribution to IDF soldiers.<sup>28</sup>

The similarity between attitudes toward journalists and those toward teachers was far from coincidental. Unlike literature or the press, education, as a distinct arena of public service, is formally subject to policy formulated in the political sphere. Considering the weighty influence exerted by a teacher, such regulation will be more

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<sup>27</sup>Ben Gurion, D. 1941. Speech before the general meeting of the Journalists Federation, *Davar*, 21 April. (Hebrew)

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous. 30 April 2002. Personal interview with former Chief Education Officer, IDF.



strictly managed in fledgling nation-states where an autonomous, trenchant network of mass communication is missing. Furthermore, in such situations, where teachers and educators act as "political knowledge agents," whether explicitly or implicitly; their impact on the formation of political and normative attitudes is even more consequential.<sup>29</sup> Control over the teaching staff is, accordingly, the linchpin of control over an evolving political culture. In the present case, this structure of control effectively prevented teachers identified with the underground's values from teaching in the public schools. Teachers who were former Etzel and Lehi supporters already employed in the system were discharged, and applicants with similar associations were barred from employment. This policy was soon brought before the courts. In 1950, Dr. Israel Eldad, a former Lehi member and one of its foremost ideologues, appealed to Israel's High Court of Justice to revoke the Minister of Defense's decision prohibiting him from teaching in a Tel Aviv high school (the *Gymnasia Herzliya*).<sup>30</sup> Although the decision, handed down on 8 February 1951, declared that obstruction of Dr. Eldad's employment was illegal; Eldad was never to hold a teaching position in the Israeli public school system.

But Etzel and Lehi veterans were not the only ones to lock horns with Ben Gurion on the subject of national historiography. When challenges to the authorized narrative of the War of Independence and its actors arose, situations interpreted as threatening Mapai's hegemonic status, Ben Gurion would launch into often-vitriolic tirades. His critics within the party and among its coalition partners were not exempted. For instance, as early as the First Knesset, a heated argument arose between

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<sup>29</sup> On the authoritative aspects of political knowledge, see Shapira, B., 1993, *The Development of Political Attitudes among Youth*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Tel Aviv University. The Department of Political Science. (Hebrew)

<sup>30</sup> *High Court of Justice Appeal No. 144/50, Dr. Israel Sheib [Eldad] v. The Minister of Defense and Others*. (Hebrew)



Ben Gurion and Yisrael Galili (representing Mapam and the kibbutzim). During its course, Ben Gurion pointed toward Galili and asked: "What did the opposition do for the sake of national rebirth?"<sup>31</sup> A tumult immediately arose. Moshe Sneh angrily left the hall while Galili delivered his first Knesset speech, in which he detailed Hagana actions throughout the War. He closed with this painful comment: "How can someone say such things about me and my comrades?"

Such episodes were often repeated. At a Mapai campaign rally held in Jaffa prior to elections to the Third Knesset, Ben Gurion again turned to Galili and his colleagues with the challenge: "Where were you?" In a Knesset speech delivered during Israel's tenth Independence Day celebrations, Ben Gurion listed those who had helped to shape the IDF but excluded the names of Hagana leaders such as Eliyahu Golomb, Shaul Avigur, Yitzchak Sadeh, and Yisrael Galili. Such attacks and insults were not universally accepted. In an *Open Letter to the Chief of the General Staff* addressed to Ben Gurion as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, the author, apparently a Hagana veteran, wrote: "How could you forget? Can someone who forgets that the Israel Defense Forces sprung from the roots of the Hagana planted before May 1948 fulfill his duty by creating a vacuum originally filled by the fighting masses?...Who can forget that the Navy was built from the Palmach's maritime units?...You, apparently, have. They say that with age one tends to remember childhood experiences...Have you yielded to senility? If so, you cannot stand the test of your military heritage. Are you capable of reviving your youth, dear commander?"<sup>32</sup>

Paradoxically, the conflict with Galili forced Ben Gurion to admit to some of the contributions made by the underground. In order to undermine Galili's claims

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<sup>31</sup> Ben Gurion, D., 23 June 1948, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>32</sup> Zion, E., 5 June 1949, *Al HaMishmar*. (Hebrew)

regarding the Hagana's historical status, Ben Gurion granted Etzel and Lehi some recognition, such as the award of the Hagana Medal. But this gesture did little to alleviate Begin's wrath and derision, expressed in Begin's comment that Ben Gurion was ready to give credit to the underground's dead but not to its living.<sup>33</sup>

It thus transpired that the person who, by manipulation of institutions and symbols had invested so much to guarantee that the story of Israel's War of Independence would be *his* story, created a situation in which he was considered not only "the leader of the War of Independence" but, in the words of Mapai's authorized chronicler, Anita Shapira, "he verily wrote its history."<sup>34</sup> Shapira continues: "The question of what Ben Gurion chose to write down and what he preferred not to is itself worthy of study...When he summarized a discussion after its conclusion, he would record the events as he understood them or as he wished to understand them."<sup>35</sup> She adds: "Very few ventured to state an opinion that contradicted those held by the Leninist prophet, legislator and commander...as the years passed, they forgot his faults...and even painted his weaknesses as strengths, such as his taste for absolute government and vilification of rivals within the party, while labeling them as troublemakers...."<sup>36</sup> Hence, these tendencies were not limited to relationships with his political competitors: the management of the war and its military operations were similarly treated. When investigating the historiography of Latrun (a mythic battle in which Hagana ineptness led to a huge number of casualties), Shapira stated that "as long as Ben Gurion continued to serve as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense,

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<sup>33</sup> Cited among Ben Gurion's remarks made during the decorations ceremony awarding the Hagana Medal.

<sup>34</sup> Shapira, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

criticism of the Latrun incident was limited to rumors and literary descriptions. Yisrael Barr's text was the only historical account written for many years."<sup>37, 38</sup>

Ben Gurion's strategy was to appropriate history to political interests; along the way, he was able to portray his role within national memory as perhaps the sole guiding spirit behind statehood and the general manager of the War of Independence. Shaul Avigur would summarize Ben Gurion's strategy as follows: "I, who saved you in the past, will also protect you in the future; you should defend and support my government."<sup>39</sup>

On 9 June 1959, a Knesset session was held on the subject of Jewish consciousness. During the session, Esther Raziel-Naor (MK, Herut), remonstrated that:

A history book is being used that contains the sentence 'Dov Gruner, the terrorist, was hanged'...This book was recommended by the Ministry of Education.<sup>40</sup>...What place do the heroes and heroines who gave their lives for their nation have in the people's consciousness? Why do we ignore them? Don't such episodes provide guidance...for creating the image of the New Jew, free of the psychological chains that bound us in exile? What do we tell our children about this subject?...How can we discriminate between families, cripples, fallen or heroes? Is it possible to hide from our youth, that the Jewish State arose once more thanks to all those who fought, worked, produced, built, and died for its sake for ten full years? This fact has been forgotten by them [Mapai-backed authors of the text]....<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Avigur, S., undated, Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, 4896. (Hebrew)

<sup>40</sup> Raziel-Naor, E., 9 June 1959, remarks made with respect to the high school history text written by Dr. Efraim Shmueli, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



Raziel-Naor had aptly expressed the underground's sorrow over non-recognition of their dead as well as their increasing sense of exclusion, the consequences of delegitimization.

### **The Historiography of Military Dead**

Beyond production of a general, historical account of the War of Independence, Ben Gurion also supported a project that rather explicitly communicated his message regarding the events and his role in them. At some point, Ben Gurion decided to produce a book in which the names of all those who had fallen during War would be inscribed. The book was meant to define for the reader, clearly and decisively, the boundaries separating those included from those excluded from Mapai's fellowship of self-sacrifice. Reference was also to be made, on a personal basis, to the families of those to whom the state was most indebted. In effect, the project sprang from an idea raised by Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir, a member of the editorial board of *The Hagana Chronicles*. A veteran of the Hagana, she joined the Ministry of Defense after it was established. Her activities were endorsed and supported by the Hagana high command; after the establishment of the State, she organized the IDF Archives within the framework of the Ministry of Defense. On 29 January 1950, it was decided to transfer the department in which she worked to the Commemoration Unit,<sup>42</sup> and convert it into what I term an *authorized memory agent*. Pinkerfeld-Amir's task, begun in April 1948, was defined as the "exhaustive collection of personal material regarding the War's dead so as to carefully prepare these materials as inclusive testimony to their sacrifice." The material would be deposited in a shrine. The work was to be done, at

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<sup>42</sup> Sirkin, E. 29 January 1950, letter to Shaul Avigur, IDF Archives 26/60-13. (Hebrew)

"her own initiative," as these activities were not included in any overall plan.<sup>43</sup> After receiving Ben Gurion's blessings, her project was officially launched.

At a meeting held on 15 June 1950, Pinkerfeld-Amir and Ben Gurion decided what her activities were to entail: "The material to be collected will cover every phase of a man's life, biographical information, photos, comments and reminiscences, testimonials and articles as well as objects related to his spiritual legacy, such as letters, diaries, collected works of art, libraries, and so forth...." At the same meeting it was decided that a Heroes' Shrine would be the place "to appropriately house the material, volume by volume, one volume per individual...printed on the best paper to withstand the ravages of time. A reading room will be established next to the Shrine, where the volumes will be easily located, arranged by occupation, such as scientists or agriculturalists,...or by event...The Prime Minister accepted the idea but stated that it would be advisable to include soldiers active prior to Israel's declaration of its independence." Pinkerfeld-Amir adds that according to the original plan, the Shrine would include all national war dead from the period of the Shomer, the Hagana, World War Two, the period of illegal immigration and the *Ha'apala* [blockade-running], and the rebellion.<sup>44</sup>

Pinkerfeld-Amir was subsequently placed at the head of the Servicemen's Commemoration Section. I suggest that Pinkerfeld-Amir's sense of the educational goals to be served by her project motivated her request for an official appointment. Her staff diligently labored to collect all the personal effects available, from photographs to letters, but also eulogies and obituaries, commemorative pamphlets and books.

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<sup>43</sup> Taken from a detailed list of Pinkerfeld-Amir's activities as noted in a letter sent to an official of the Information and Public Relations Department, the Ministry of Defense, 3 July 1950, IDF Archives, 758/1953/133. (Hebrew)

<sup>44</sup> Unsigned, 19 June 1950, memorandum relating to the meeting between Pinkerfeld-Amir and Ben Gurion, IDF Archives, 758/1953/133. (Hebrew)

Questionnaires were distributed to the friends and family of the dead in order to collect as much information as possible. The concept informing this massive effort was not confined to that of a national "memory bank"; rather, it was the assumption that the War's dead were characterized by "national personal values" whose "inculcation was" a vital asset for the entire nation." To do so, the Section's staff requested any material that might "shed any light on the [fallen soldier's] views, attitudes toward the country and its problems...."<sup>45</sup>

A summary review of the questionnaire quickly reveals exactly who displayed these "national personal values." Under "Details of Military Service," the following items are listed: service abroad, service locally, the Hagana, recruitment, training, active service, unit, battles. The possibility of serving in Etzel or Lehi was not raised. Because the only pre-State affiliation mentioned is the Hagana,<sup>46</sup> the authors of the questionnaire imply that only Hagana members, whether living or dead, embody the national defense ethos.

Had this project been confined to archival purposes, it would remain interesting but tangential to our argument. Instead, the long-term goal of the project was to convert the Archives into a national education center, where schoolchildren would be exposed to and encouraged to write about the "martyrs' heritage," as it was called, a source of lofty values. Pinkerfeld-Amir's idea received additional support from Yad Labanim, the public association involved in commemoration whose members were primarily bereaved parents. In 1949, the latter suggested that the collected material be concentrated and made available to the public in the Heroes' Shrines to be built in Israel's three major cities. Ben Gurion actively supported the

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<sup>45</sup> Leaflet describing the activities of the IDF Archives. 1950, IDF Archives, 758/1953/8. (Hebrew)

<sup>46</sup> Questionnaire distributed to the families of fallen soldiers that was sent to Kibbutz Manara (specific example found) and all the agricultural settlements aligned with the Labor Movement. IDF Archives, 758/1953/8. (Hebrew)



idea. Y. Dekel, Head of the Ministry of Defense Commemoration Unit offered a counterproposal, that of constructing a single, national shrine on Mount Herzl to also contain documentation about the Shomer and Hagana.<sup>47</sup>

Pinkerfeld-Amir turned to all the families officially recognized as bereaved; in addition to documents she requested correspondence and other written material, asked parents to record their memories of their son's military service, with an emphasis on relationships with siblings, spouses, and those comrades in his army unit with whom he was particularly close. Pinkerfeld-Amir admits that this personal initiative "was begun with a sense of anxiety concerning the substantial value of the historical, sociological, and human material that would be lost as memories of their lost sons receded."

The first in the *Yizkor* series, the title chosen by Pinkerfeld-Amir, was published in 1955; it was based on a collection of about 5,000 files.<sup>48</sup> The editors note that, like the legislation that assigned official "war dead" status on the basis of the date of the incident during which the soldier died, the volume:

...includes the names of all those fallen in Israel's War of Independence, during the period beginning with the UN declaration of 29 November 1947 until 10 March 1949...The book's direct aim is to commemorate our soldiers who sacrificed their lives to achieve independence and national redemption. We should note, however, that this collection...is to be used as an accurate source for those scholars who would devote themselves to describing the sociological background and psychological motives of this new generation of *Hashmonaim*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Memorandum sent to the Director General of the Ministry of Defense, 12 January 1954. (Hebrew)

<sup>48</sup> Edna Pinkerfeld-Amir, A., 26 December 1950, letter jointly addressed to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Education, IDF Archives, 220-70-39. (Hebrew)

<sup>49</sup> A major Biblical dynasty.

Pinkerfeld-Amir's efforts, heartily supported by Ben Gurion, created an institutionalized, smoothly run system within the Ministry of Defense that labored on behalf of the construction of national memory sites. The generous funding, large and dedicated staff, together with support from the political leadership facilitated the painstaking collection of items. Drafts of the written biographies were reviewed by parents who filled in the missing particulars. When basic personal details were missing, the names were sent to the Ministry of Immigration, local government offices and employers, and families residing overseas. The names of the fallen were published in the daily press and regularly transmitted over national radio, together with requests for additional information.<sup>50</sup>

The evolution of the Heroes' Shrine deserves some further attention. After the idea of creating a shrine housing the original documents was accepted,<sup>51</sup> the issue of its location arose. It was Pinkerfeld-Amir who, as early as 1949, demanded that the shrine be erected on Mount Herzl, near the entrance to the military cemetery. Ben Gurion objected to its proximity to the cemetery but pledged to locate the building within Jerusalem. He even confirmed the project's proposed budget and requested that a sketch of the structure be prepared. Both were prepared by her brother, the architect Yaakov Pinkerfeld.<sup>52</sup> Yad Labanim later accepted her proposal in principle yet made a similar but independent request. Pinkerfeld-Amir viewed the role of the shrine as separate from that of military cemeteries and monuments. The need for such an institution was based on the "fear for the documents whose collection was at the verge of completion...They will be neglected if someone is not found to tend them." Her

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<sup>50</sup> These efforts were described in the volume's foreword.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Unsigned, 18 June 1950, protocol of meeting between Pinkerfeld-Amir and Ben Gurion. D., IDF Archives, 758/1953/133. (Hebrew)

anxiety regarding the material she had collected drove her decision "not to rest until I know that the collection will be protected."<sup>53</sup>

To Pinkerfeld-Amir, the individual commemorative volumes to be placed in the library and personally managed by her as part of the Heroes' Shrine would be uniform in style and format, parallel to the uniformity characterizing the gravestones found in military cemeteries. The texts would be "typewritten, without a [carbon] copy," because "the volumes in the shrine would follow the principle of uniqueness — each one individual, and under the nation's protection."<sup>54</sup> It appears that Pinkerfeld-Amir viewed the preparation of these books as a sacred act, similar to the preparation of arcane, well-guarded religious manuscripts. Consonant with this attitude, the volumes would be placed in a circular format, its "gallery empty but for the stacks housing the nearly 500 books placed around its walls; in the center, an eternal flame would burn."<sup>55</sup>

Notwithstanding their historical importance, the items collected by Pinkerfeld-Amir were consecrated to those living in the present:

We also owe you [the bereaved] preservation of the complete and exhaustive testimony...regarding those who bequeathed their lives to us and to the nation. We promise you that future generations will know who travailed to bring this about. We have therefore collected everything we could obtain about their actions. These objects will be placed in a special shrine to be built as a monument rich in meaning, a place of study and communion with their memory.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Footnote 44.

<sup>54</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, A. October 1950, Letter to the Director General of the Ministry of Defense. IDF Archives 758/1953/133. (Hebrew)

<sup>55</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, A. 20 March 1950, letter to the Chairman of the Committee of Judges for the Planning of Mount Herzl. IDF Archives 758/1953/133. (Hebrew)

<sup>56</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, A., 12 March 1950, letter to Ezra Yulis, a bereaved brother. IDF Archives 758/1953/262. (Hebrew)



Because her personal objectives suited Ben Gurion's program of control over the War's historiography, he supported the project.

A similar project begun at about the same time was preparation of the book entitled *Gvilei Esh (Parchments of Fire)*. The project was rooted in Ben Gurion's view that the community of the dead, as a symbolic entity, was of unique educational worth for inculcation of the values — such as voluntary extension of tours of duty — that supported the nation-building enterprise. Thus, on 7 December 1949, the first announcements of the intention to produce an "anthology of the creative works written by fallen soldiers" appeared in the press and on the radio. This request was directed to "parents and relatives, friends and acquaintances of those fallen during the War of Independence." Specifically, they were asked to forward creative works — letters, diaries, poems, stories, travelogues, theoretical and scientific texts, paintings, sculptures, musical works and so forth — to the Commemoration Unit at their earliest convenience.<sup>57</sup>

The task of editing the anthology was entrusted to the poet Reuben Avinoam. Once again, "entry" into the confines of a cultural-educational project was limited to those who had fallen in the course of the conflict with the Arabs. As two of the members of the editorial staff, Yitzchak Ben-Zvi and Reuben Avinoam, wrote to Ben Gurion: "The essence of the suggested project is to collect creative materials ... produced by every soldier who fell after 28 November."<sup>58</sup> Taking into account the project's aim — to inform the public about thinkers and teachers who had provided the fallen with ideological and spiritual guidance — Ben Gurion made clear his preference for citations from A.D. Gordon and even his own works rather than the

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<sup>57</sup> Letter to the State Press Office from the Public Relations Department, December 1949, IDF Archives 758/1953/21. (Hebrew)

<sup>58</sup> Ben Zvi, Y. and R. Avinoam, 3 May 1949, letter to D. Ben Gurion, IDF Archives. 758/1953/21. (Hebrew)

writings of Jabotinsky or Uri Zvi Greenberg.<sup>59</sup> His stance was rooted in the belief he wished to propagate that the War's dead were exceptional beings, unlike the average man in the street. To him, they were members of a spiritual elite who, by their deaths, had joined a select group, the carriers of ideologically edifying qualities of the first order. Therefore, one of the nation's moral obligations was to assemble their literary works. Even seminar papers were to be collected; their authors' martyr status endowed these prosaic academic exercises with special value: "These items will help complete the image of an entire generation of fighters for their country" continued Ben Zvi and Avinoam.<sup>60</sup> This statement was made in complete sincerity because both editors viewed their task as a mission: to reveal and explore the souls and personalities of morally superior beings, "the Israeli soldier[s]"<sup>61</sup> who had built the new nation while envisioning its future.

The project began thusly. Ben Gurion first received a letter from one Avinoam Grossman with the suggestion to publish the writings of his deceased son. Grossman was then requested to expand the book to include the works of others killed. In August 1952, Grossman was appointed "the literary editor of the [Commemoration] Unit."<sup>62</sup> The foreword to *Gvilei Esh* was written by Mordechai Guber.

At the literary event held to celebrate the publication of *Gvilei Esh*, Ben Gurion made a speech directed at the nation's youth in which he described the models who displayed these virtues and, perhaps more importantly, those who did not:

You've all probably heard about young people apprehended in the process of committing a robbery or a rape, about bands of political hooligans like those

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<sup>59</sup> The leading Revisionist poet and intellectual.

<sup>60</sup> See footnote 58.

<sup>61</sup> Cited from the transcripts of a radio interview given by R. Avinoam, 30 June 1949, IDF Archives, 78/1953/21. (Hebrew)

<sup>62</sup> Unsigned, 28 May 1952, memorandum summarizing meeting between Dekel, Y. and Peres, S., Director General of the Ministry of Defense, IDF Archives, unnumbered (Hebrew)

who try to bomb the homes of government ministers or stone the Knesset...[yet] you have also heard about how other young people withstood the Arab bands before the State was established, and how they fought the Arab armies after independence.<sup>63</sup>

The "political hooligans" he referred to were the Etzel and Lehi sympathizers who had instigated a violent public confrontation a few days earlier in protest against the government's intention to renew diplomatic ties with Germany. That clash, organized by Herut, had ended with the participants stoning the Knesset. Ben Gurion's speech — by mentioning only opposition to current issues — demonstrated his implacable evasion of any recognition of the underground's contribution to the War. The Knesset session, which had been devoted to national memory and commemoration, was exploited by Ben Gurion to verbally scuffle with his opponents. This tactic, all too common among politicians, nonetheless had serious impacts on the nation's collective memory of the past.

The first real test of the place to be awarded to Etzel and Lehi dead in the statist commemoration literature arose during the treatment of the Refineries (*Batei Hazikuk* in Hebrew) incident.<sup>64</sup> Yosef Dekel mirrored the operative exclusionary regulations in his statement that "casualties from the 30 December 1947 raid on the Haifa Oil Refineries are not listed in any military records as war dead, nor do they appear in our files as IDF dead." According to Nehemia Argov, Ben Gurion's Military Secretary, they were not to be included in the *Yizkor* volumes given that "insufficient evidence has been found to submit their names to the Soldiers' Compensation

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<sup>63</sup> *Davar*, 25 May 1952. (Hebrew)

<sup>64</sup> Hagana action, conducted on 30 December 1947 meant to blow up the Haifa Refineries, which supplied the British army with gasoline. As a result of this operation, the Arabs initiated a massacre against Jewish Refinery workers.



Commission."<sup>65</sup> Hence, they were also ineligible for mention in the official commemorative literature soon to be written.

The contents of a letter written by Yigael Yadin to Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir in the wake of the Refineries incident indicates that prior to that event, policy covering inclusion of soldiers killed in action within the commemorative literature suffered from a lack of implementative guidelines:

The editorial criteria applied to the *Yizkor* project are far from explicit...If, for instance, all the dead from every kibbutz and Old Jerusalem, to name a few, are included in the book — then those who died at the Refineries should also be included. If not — then they, too, should be excluded...The final decision has to be made by the Minister of Defense who most certainly set the book's editorial principles.

Some criterion, even if unwritten, must have guided those made these decisions. One condition that was perceived by the relevant institutions as mandatory for inclusion of a candidate among the dead was the following: "We released them from compulsory conscription but did not demand [emphasis in original] that they go to the site."<sup>66</sup>

Anda Pinkerfeld-Amir stubbornly fought for inclusion of those who had died in the attack, as she expressed in a letter under the heading "the Refineries' victims are to be counted as recruits in all its aspects." She wrote: "Many of the participants (i.e., Refinery workers) who were undoubtedly Hagana members and working under cover, confined to the site as an important first line position, have the right to be remembered just like those who fell during any other operation."<sup>67</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, it appears, had assumed that information stating that the dead were Hagana members would bolster

<sup>65</sup> Argov, N., 14 December 1950, letter to Pinkerfeld-Amir, A., IDF Archives, 758/1953/72. (Hebrew)

<sup>66</sup> Yadin, Y. 15 June 1950, letter to Pinkerfeld-Amir, A., IDF Archives, 758/1953/72. (Hebrew)

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

her campaign to persuade the government of their right to state commemoration. A memorandum written by the commander of Haifa Suburbs and Eastern Galilee Region, later killed in action, and verified by Moshe Carmel, the Regional Commander, was attached to Pinkerfeld-Amir's letter. The contents of the memorandum reveal that as of 7 May 1948, it had been decided "not to conscript these people [Haifa Oil Refineries staff] for either full or partial duty. Their employers consider them to be enlisted servicemen...due to the [strategic] importance of the site."<sup>68</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir also made it clear that her purpose was not substantive, a ploy meant to help the families acquire compensation or other concrete benefits, but symbolic, as a means to accept them within the official family of the bereaved: "These families are not requesting any compensation, which they have already received from the Refineries."

By treating the Refineries' workers as "unofficial" members of the Hagana, Pinkerfeld-Amir hoped to incorporate them into the community identified as the wellspring of national heroes.<sup>69</sup> She went so far as to request that the said workers be conscripted retroactively so as to be eligible for inclusion in her book.<sup>70</sup> While acknowledging that such a decision was a military rather than political prerogative, she nonetheless wrote the following to Ben Gurion as Minister of Defense: "If they are...to be considered as soldiers, this decision should be made by the General Staff...Please resolve this issue without delay because we are in the final stages of the book's preparation."<sup>71</sup> It should be understood, however, that Pinkerfeld-Amir's efforts were in large part determined by the demands of standing legislation, which stipulated

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, A., 19 December 1950, letter to Argov, N., IDF Archives, 758/1953/72. (Hebrew)

<sup>70</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, A., 19 December 1950, letter to Ben Gurion, D., Ministry of Defense, IDF Archives, 758/1953/72. (Hebrew)

<sup>71</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, A. undated, Letter to Prime Minister D. Ben Gurion, IDF Archives, 758/1953/72. (Hebrew)

that retrospective conscription of the deceased enabled their inclusion in the official register of those "killed in action," a status that would have entitled them to State commemoration and their families to state support. At the same time, the Director of the IDF Archives, requested that the Refineries gather "as quickly as...possible all available information about the casualties, such as dates, biographical details, photographs, personal milestones, recollections, and so forth..." while noting that "the Refineries tragedy is an incident deserving special mention" within the framework of the Archives' commemorative activities. It appears that Pinkerfeld-Amir personally initiated inclusion of the victims within the commemorative literature, presumably without anticipating intervention from other authorized sources or political-legislative actions.

Cases of such acts of policy delineation by those responsible for its implementation – as opposed to its formulation – is commonly found in the scholarly literature. Administrators frequently deviate from the bureaucratically determined confines of their authority in order to promote policy appropriate to their organizational affiliations and professional values. Thus, questionnaires were sent to the dead soldiers' families from the office of the Director of the IDF Archives by way of the Refineries' management. On 22 December 1948, the Director also sent a letter to the Refineries' Commemoration Committee informing them that actions were being taken to "preserve the memory of our fallen soldiers; we intend to prepare an inclusive *Yizkor* book containing their names as well."<sup>72</sup> Although his response denied the Refineries' request to publish a special commemorative volume devoted to the

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<sup>72</sup> Director, the IDF Archives, 22 December 1948, letter to the Committee for Commemoration of the Haifa Refineries Martyrs, IDF Archives, 758/1953/72. (Hebrew)



incident's victims, he assured them that their names would be included in a future comprehensive volume prepared by his office.

The attitude of the IDF Archives toward inclusion of the Refineries' dead within the commemorative literature reveals that the procedures applied by the Commemorative Unit, as transmitted to Pinkerfeld-Amir, were to become official policy. It's announcement that "if any of the fallen were members of the Hagana at the time of their deaths, whether or not they were completing a tour of duty, they will be counted among those who sacrificed themselves during the War"<sup>73</sup> essentially broadened state recognition of the dead beyond what Ben Gurion had intended.

This humanitarian expansiveness, which ignored attempts to maintain central political control over the nation's memory sites, was not, however, extended to the underground's dead. Families of those Etzel and Lehi members who had lost their lives during Hagana-led operations were categorically denied entry into the official family of the bereaved. This exclusion is pithily illustrated by the experience of the Gelbgisser family whose twin sons, Shlomo and Menachem, were killed in action. The names of the brothers, as relatives — the only set of twins who fell during the War of Independence — do not appear in any state publication honoring the dead. Nor was one line dedicated to them by the period's "court poets." Although "they left no literary heritage to speak of, the editors of th[e] polished and valuable commemorative book [i.e., *Gvilei Esh*] did not bother or feel it necessary to request any material about them."<sup>74</sup> This point becomes clearer when we consider that one of the twins, Menachem, is included in a volume commemorating IDF dead: He was killed in May

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<sup>73</sup> Pinkerfeld-Amir, A., 26 April 1950, letter to Ben-Horin, Y., IDF Archives, 758/1953/262. (Hebrew)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

1949, after his unit, originally part of Etzel, had joined the IDF; the thus reorganization qualified him as an IDF conscript. Shlomo, Menachem's twin, had died earlier, as a member of Etzel; he was therefore automatically excluded from mention.

Under the caption "Discrimination — Even in Condolence," the twins' father, Yaakov, wrote the following in a letter dated 5 May 1949 to Ben Gurion:

I notified you in the same letter that I had lost both my beloved sons during the War of Independence. Honoring the memory of one son while ostracizing the memory of the other reveals how insincere are your condolences regarding the grief felt by bereaved parents. It shows a lack of understanding of their pain, and even adds to their grief.<sup>75</sup>

Together with his letter, Gelbgisser returned the condolence card he had received following Menachem's death, which had been sent from the Prime Minister's office. In a later letter, Gelbgisser continued: "The Prime Minister and Minister of Defense has to be aware that even if Etzel was not to his liking, its members nevertheless gave their lives to their country, not less than did the Hagana. If a family lost two of its children, only one of whom did not belong to the Hagana, there is no need to discriminate to the point of intensifying the pain felt by the bereaved parents."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in a letter from Gelbgisser, Y. to the Editors, *Herut*, undated, personal correspondence. (Hebrew)

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

### Entry into the Family of the Bereaved

Parallel to the production of statist commemorative literature, Ben Gurion endowed privately published volumes with his imprimatur. His sanction was meant to convert the commemoration literature initiated by families or organizations into widely distributed and socially meaningful documents. He scrupulously collected these books, read them and wrote comments in the margins; he drafted emotional letters to the families, often adding a personal foreword to the separate volumes. An excellent example of this process of transformation of private texts into widely-distributed public property are *The Brothers' Book*<sup>77</sup> and *Toward the Lights of Lachish*,<sup>78</sup> written by Rivka Guber, a teacher by training, which became "best sellers," texts representing Israel's emerging statist culture. Introductions to the texts were written by the Mapai leadership — Golda Meir and David Ben Gurion. The books' official aura gradually increased owing to a series of actions taken over the years by official bodies. After publication of *Toward the Lights of Lachish*, Rivka Guber was named "Israel's Mother" by *Hed Hachinuch* (*The Voice of Education*), the widely circulated gazette published by the Federation of Teachers.<sup>79</sup> Her books were defined as "instructional," "required reading" for schoolchildren.<sup>80</sup> "Here is a book to enlighten us, our children, and future generations of immigrants," wrote a *Davar* columnist.<sup>81</sup> In the process, Guber was transformed from a bereaved mother into an author, a leading intellectual and shaper of public opinion. Her being Ben Gurion's political ally would ease her way into all Mapai institutions Ben Gurion would establish, facilitated his presenting her as an exemplary figure worthy of emulation.

<sup>77</sup> Guber, R., 1950. *The Brothers Book*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew)

<sup>78</sup> Guber, R., 1963, *Toward the Lights of Lachish*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., Tel Aviv: Am Oved. Hebrew.

<sup>79</sup> *Hed HaChinuch*, Fall, 1952. (Hebrew)

<sup>80</sup> *Davar*, 23 June 1961. (Hebrew)

<sup>81</sup> *Davar*, 1 July 1979. (Hebrew)



The relationship between Guber and Ben Gurion began after the War of Independence, with publication of Guber's *The Brothers Book*, a collection of the brothers' journals, poems, and letters. Its format inspired Ben Gurion to initiate the *Gvilei Esh* project. Upon reading the book, Ben Gurion wrote: "The fact that two brothers [should be willing to sacrifice themselves] is in itself a worthy example for this and coming generations. However, the book reveals something even loftier...our generation is blessed with the presence of such mothers among us. Perhaps this is the real, buried secret of the 'miracle' that has occurred to us." His closing comments indicate his decision to transform the book and its format into a model for cultural-political indoctrination:

I would view it a great honor if you would allow the Ministry of Defense to publish this book (I will retain its title, *The Brothers Book*, although it could also be entitled *The Mother's Book*), and will allocate IL£1000 for this purpose.<sup>82</sup>

And so, the Ministry of Defense published and distributed Guber's book for several editions; followed by its translation into various languages, all financed by the Ministry. "We felt that the book would glorify the country for the Diaspora as well" wrote the Gubers to Ben Gurion upon receipt of funds to cover the cost of translating the book into English.<sup>83</sup> Used as a statement of the evolving society's values during its battle for national survival, the translation was distributed abroad as part of the campaign to secure foreign support.

Locally, as could be expected, Rivka Guber became a prominent public figure, and earned the nickname "the boys' mother," as the quintessential symbol of bereaved

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<sup>82</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 24 August 1950, letter to Guber, R., Ben Gurion Archives, File 1/10/λ. (Hebrew)

<sup>83</sup> E. and R. Guber, E. and R., 3 April 1951, letter to Ben Gurion. For the full correspondence and details regarding the project's financing, see Ben Gurion Archives, File 1/10/λ. (Hebrew)

Israeli motherhood. Many of the public events held in Guber's honor, including the tenth and twentieth celebrations of her books' publication, were attended by government officials and Mapai leaders, Guber herself being a member of the Labor Party. At the twentieth anniversary of *The Brothers Book*, in a speech entitled *Being Worthy*, Guber recounted the story of her sons' sacrifice.

The Gubers were not the only ones to enjoy Ben Gurion's politically motivated assistance upon their entry into the official family of the bereaved. In March 1963, the parents of Varda Friedman, killed in 1956, wrote the following to Ben Gurion:

At the...seventh anniversary of our tragedy, we turn to you...Until now, the name of our cherished Varda has not appeared among the lists of revered victims that fell while on duty...for us, heartbroken parents, the only thing left is her sacred memory...For the sake of future generations, we think it appropriate to guarantee that her dear name be enshrined in a *Yizkor* volume.<sup>84</sup>

Although Varda Friedman was not a soldier in the strict sense — she was a volunteer working in a moshav for resettled new immigrants (*olim* in Hebrew) — she did participate in a project, immigrant absorption, having political as well as social significance, one that was strongly supported by Ben Gurion. Thus, it was Ben Gurion himself who suggested that a commemorative volume be published in the memory of Varda Friedman, whose parents were from Kfar Vitkin, a moshav closely associated with Mapai. Such a volume, which functioned as a means to appropriate her memory, was used as a lever to equate the immigrant absorption project with service in the IDF:

To me, the act of [moshav youth] meeting directly with olim and extending them human comfort and assistance is no less important than serving in the

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<sup>84</sup> Friedman, F. and Y., 19 March 1963, letter to Ben Gurion. Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

IDF...Such a book...will be her monument...[as well as] enormously educational...A committee should be established to plan and write the book. I will gladly participate in such a committee. I also suggest that Moshe Dayan be appointed as one of its members....<sup>85</sup>

After the Friedmans expressed their doubts that moshav members would readily participate in the book project,<sup>86</sup> Ben Gurion replied: "I will contact a number of young people and together with Moshe Dayan, who was among the major sponsors of the program to visit the olim, I hope to persuade them to cooperate. As you know, I am prepared to turn to those IDF soldiers who have something to tell about Varda...I would like the volume to be dedicated to both Varda and the program."<sup>87</sup>

From his offices at the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv, Ben Gurion subsequently organized the book's steering committee. Included among its members were Ben Gurion himself, Bracha Hebbs, Uzi Feinerman, Shalom Zohar, and Avraham Green Wozki. Under his leadership, the team's work was extensive: They visited villages where Varda had worked, gathered material, interviewed the young people she had worked with, and screened stories about her. Ben Gurion "appointed" himself as editor-in-chief; protocols of the committee's meetings indicated his intense involvement in decisions about the book's content, its structure and chapter titles.<sup>88</sup> "To me, this book has two aims, first, it is dedicated to the memory of Varda and those others who survived: but mainly, its aim is to inform the young about what it means to be in favor of immigration,...to be interested in [the immigrants'] fate...It

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<sup>85</sup> Friedman, F. and Y. 2 April 1963, letter to Ben Gurion, Sde Boker, Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew) Especially significant for the purposes of my argument is the suggested inclusion of Moshe Dayan, one of the charismatic leaders of the Hagana and future Minister of Defense, in the book's steering committee.

<sup>86</sup> Friedman, Y. 23 April 1963, letter to Ben Gurion, Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>87</sup> Ben Gurion, D. 27 April 1963, letter to Y. Friedman, Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>88</sup> Protocol: Meeting regarding publication of the book in memory of Varda Friedman, Offices of the Minister of Defense, HaKiryat, 24 May 1963, Sde Boker, Ben Gurion Archives. (Hebrew)



should serve as an example to [the young]."<sup>89</sup> Thus, it is easily discerned that in the case of Varda Friedman, like that of the Guber brothers, Ben Gurion felt little compunction in bridling the recollection and commemoration of the dead to his chosen political goals.

### Shelach

"Among its other tasks, Shelach, as an organization, battles against the distortion of history and the obfuscation of the truth. One of its aims is to construct a shrine to our heroes so that their memory will live forever in the nation's history."<sup>90</sup> So wrote Shelach's leaders about the goals they had set for themselves during the nation's first decade. In terms of the conceptual framework applied in this dissertation, Shelach's leadership saw itself as agents of collective memory, the guardians of its memory sites, avowed to present their version of the "true" story of Israel's rebellion against the British. Their address to the readers of the leaflet advertising Shelach's activities, distributed on the eve of Independence Day 1958 — "To all lovers of the truth" — expresses this, their main objective. Especially important to note is that in addition to the emotional and financial support given to bereaved families and disabled veterans, Menachem Begin, as the leader of what remained of the Revisionist movement, saw "presentation of the truth" to be Shelach's paramount political role.

Shelach's Commemoration Department was established in order to "perpetuate the underground and its activities within the nation's soul. Their acts of bravery, unparalleled in the history of mankind and the feats of those executed [by the British] would have become, had they occurred elsewhere, inspirational chapters taught in

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Leaflet sent from Shelach to members of the Herut movement on the even of Remembrance Day, 1958. The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17/5-16L.

schools, parables told by mothers to their sons. Here, these acts were maliciously ignored or distorted. In such circumstances, the activities of the Department in the preservation of historical truth and the education of Israel's younger generation and of those in the Diaspora who are unaware of what transpired in the homeland are exceptionally important."<sup>91</sup>

Shelach undertook a series of projects that paralleled those initiated by the state. As opposed to the *Yizkor* volumes, which excluded Etzel and Lehi dead from their pages, the organization published a volume entitled *Haporshot (The Renegades)*, dedicated to the underground's dead. In effect, the project had begun much earlier, endowed with a broader, more-inclusive historical vision. On 5 December 1948, the Jabotinsky Institute and the Herut Office for Servicemen on Active Duty announced plans to produce a "book to commemorate those who had fought in the rebellion."<sup>92</sup> It would be dedicated to the "memory of the heroes of the Jewish rebellion against British rule...irrespective of their ideological orientation or organizational affiliation." That is, the book would also include the names of all Hagana members who fell in the cause of independence. Its intent was not to personalize the project — that is, not to consecrate the memory of individual Etzel members — but to recount a chapter in the nation's history that the authorized historiography had neglected by focusing exclusively on the military conflict with the invading Arab armies.

Preparations for the book were exceedingly complicated, especially in the absence of government financial and organizational support. Another obstacle was the lack of an orderly and detailed list of dead and their addresses, the result of the underground conditions under which Etzel and Lehi had operated. All the material

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

was eventually gathered, including photographs of the majority of the dead, and transferred to the Jabotinsky Institute. Material relating to those killed after 29 November 1949 was transferred to the Commemoration Unit at the Ministry of Defense, which had guaranteed to include the names of Etzel and Lehi members within a *Yizkor* volume dedicated to all those who had surrendered their lives in the war against the Arabs.

In the end, the book published by the Jabotinsky Institute and Herut in 1956 contained names of the underground's dead only. This outcome, contrary to the project's original aims, was a direct response to Ben Gurion's policy. Those who had served in the Hagana while fighting against the British were recognized as "legitimate" dead by Ben Gurion and entered the authorized commemorative texts, irrespective of the dates or official confirmation of the circumstances of their deaths. Organizational — meaning political — affiliation was openly declared as the determining factor.

In protest, the editors of Shelach wrote the following in the introduction to their commemorative volume, entitled *To Their Eternal Memory*:

In the heat of the rebellion preceding the United Nations' decision and during the war against the invading Arab armies, many died. Their perseverance in the face of the enemy...astounded the entire world. Among these heroes were those who willingly sacrificed themselves to the British executioner so that our nation could be reborn. However, after the establishment of the State, which was achieved at the cost of their blood, government leaders and ministers were averse to honoring their memory. Moreover, the government actually tried to dismiss and ignore them and their deeds. In order to pay homage to the underground, its heroes and their acts of heroism...Shelach has gathered herein the biographies of all the heroes belonging to Etzel [and Lehi]...from



the 1936 pogrom to the years of rebellion against alien rule and concluding with the War of Independence against the...Arab invaders."<sup>93</sup>

In light of its ideological and historical purpose, the book is divided into six sections; each dedicated to a watershed in the campaign for independence.<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps the most politically and symbolically meaningful section was the fifth section, devoted to the victims of Hagana operations, especially during the period of the Season and the assault on the Altalena. Moreover, the internal organization of the book parallels that of the *Yizkor* series: It begins with "Remember!" a secular-statist "prayer" written by Menachem Begin, eulogizing the fallen. But contrary to the authorized texts, the eulogy specifically mentions the underground and the injustice committed to their memory by Ben Gurion and his Mapai government.<sup>95</sup>

Shelach projects were, in effect, analogues to their Mapai predecessors. So, in addition to the analogous texts, it was decided to establish "Shelach Publications" that, together with the *Herut* publishing house, would publish books to retell the underground's story as a counter-measure to the authorized texts. The list of published works was quite respectable. It included a book recounting the conquest of Jaffa,<sup>96</sup> an album on the history of the War of Independence; *To the Gallows*, which commemorated the memory of the Etzel and Lehi members hanged by the British; and the autobiographical *The Story of the Altalena's Captain*, by Eliyahu Lankin.

Ben Gurion's focus on educational texts likewise prompted a response. For example, in September 1951 it was decided to publish a work to commemorate the

<sup>93</sup> Taken from Begin, M., 1949 Introduction, *To Their Lasting Memory*, Tel Aviv: Shelach. (Hebrew)

<sup>94</sup> These sections were: (1) Victims of British executions, (2) Casualties of the 1929 riots, (3) Lehi members who died during World War II. (4) Casualties during the rebellion against the British Enslaver. (5) By Cain's Hand. (6) Etzel martyrs who fell in the war against the Arab bands and invading armies.

<sup>95</sup> Begin, M., 1949. *To Their Lasting Memory*, Tel Aviv: Shelach. (Hebrew).

<sup>96</sup> Lazar-Litai, C., 1951. *The Conquest of Jaffa*, Tel Aviv: Shelach. (Hebrew)

operations conducted by the Jewish underground and balance the impression created by *The History of the Rebellion*, published by the Ministry of Defense, which was to become the leading public school text on the War of Independence. Shelach's version of the War, entitled *The National Revolution*, was meant to describe Etzel's efforts and "preserve the historical truth for the coming generations, to prevent falsification of the facts." This, like the other works published, was intended to lend historical credence to the political project Begin would call "the revolt," the opposition to Mapai's official policy of cooperation with the British and the subsequent attempt to rid Palestine of foreign rule. Significantly, the book's opening chapter deals with Hagana qualms over the elite's position vis-à-vis the British Mandate and De Haan's murder,<sup>97</sup> whereas its closing chapter recounts the sinking of the *Altalena* and the absorption of Etzel and Lehi into the IDF. The identity of the book's editors is also revealing: Abba Achimeir, commander of the so-called "band of thugs,"<sup>98</sup> (*Brit HaBiryoni*) and M. Segal, commander of Etzel's Jerusalem (Wailing Wall) contingent.<sup>99</sup>

The emphasis placed in these works on the "national" rather than "statist" character of the events reflects the differences in the respective attitudes toward the War and its outcomes. In contrast to the statist approach that glorified individual actors, Shelach's definition of independence as a "national" project opened the door to the participation of groups of all political colors. This approach was emphasized in all the works published by Shelach that recounted the story of the underground movements. These accounts made public the Hagana's persecutions of Etzel and Lehi

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<sup>97</sup> Yaakov Yisrael De Haan, a Protestant from the Netherlands, arrived in Palestine in the 1920s. He converted and eventually became a member of an extremist ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist faction, *Neturei Karta*. Because of his intensive activity against the Zionist institutions, he was "executed" by the head of the Hagana in 1934.

<sup>98</sup> Band of Thugs: the label assigned to a terrorist group whose ideology support Lehi.

<sup>99</sup> *Commemoration of the War by the Jewish Underground and Its Operations*. Report to Shelach, 13 September 1951. The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 3\4-372. (Hebrew)



together with their implications for contemporary politics. In the introduction to the pamphlet *The Background of Israel's War of Independence — Factors Regarding the Relationship between the National Military Organization and the Hagana*, the author wrote: "We would have seen no cause to publish this report...if not for the campaign of vilification and polemics currently conducted by the Hagana leadership against Etzel."<sup>100</sup>

Shelach's activities likewise highlighted discontinuities in structural identification with Revisionist ideology. Contrary to those educational and literary-historiographical activities launched by Ben Gurion, every aspect of Shelach's projects points to a clear separation between private initiatives and commemoration on the municipal level on the one hand and Herut's ability to influence state and national policies on the same subjects on the other. To illustrate, in September 1957, Oved Ben-Ami, Netanya's mayor and a veteran of the underground, turned to Shelach with the request to provide updated material for the purpose of "preparing a pamphlet to inform the public about Netanya's participation in the War of Independence." The mayor requested "details...publishable testimony and documents," while stressing that he was interested in this material "for the sake of historical truth."<sup>101</sup> That is, the responsibility for doing so was seen to be local and unrelated to national programs.

Returning to Mapai, the same hegemonic control that Ben Gurion attempted to exercise over the cultural production of pre-state historiography penetrated the individual sphere. As opposed to the writers and intellectuals surrounding Ben Gurion, authors who professed rightist inclinations found the road blocked to influential positions in the new state's literary establishment. Nevertheless, they, like the

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<sup>100</sup> Hasson, 1948. Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 3\4-125. (Hebrew)

<sup>101</sup> Ben-Ami, O., Mayor of Netanya, letter to Shelach, 12 September 1957. The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 17/5-L16. (Hebrew)



historians who prepared Shelach's published works, replicated the activities of the Commemoration Unit in their own meagerly funded efforts and therefore continued to isolate themselves from the mainstream. Figures such as Dr. Israel Eldad, Dr. Ben-Zion Netanyahu, and Prof. Joseph Klausner, who were otherwise denied access to major public platforms, openly supported Shelach and its attempts to supplement the authorized statist versions of the past. As Prof. Klausner wrote:

Many things can incite anger and bitterness in individuals of a moral strain...One such act is being witnessed before our eyes in the State of Israel: During a period of four years (1944-1948), several hundred members of Etzel and Lehi dedicated their lives to the liberation of Palestine...Yet, the government of Israel is unwilling to provide these warriors with any comfort or support...The injured and disabled, their widows and orphans ...receive nothing...Only Shelach provides them with any care...At the same time, the organization makes sure that the history to be written about the War of Independence...will be free... of error. I believe that not a further word is required to prove how much everyone in Israel is required to support Shelach.<sup>102</sup>

### **The Politics of Alternative Memory Sites**

Over the years, Menachem Begin unceasingly demanded that an historical inquiry into the War's management be conducted. His hope was that such a public investigation would reveal that the official narrative of the War was partial, subjective, and politically biased. He chose a commission of inquiry because this instrument's mandate was not limited to revelation of the truth. rather, recommendations were inherently political in terms of their potential impacts. To the degree that a commission refuted, as he was convinced it would, the authorized versions of the

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<sup>102</sup>Joseph Klausner, Prof. Joseph. January 1951, letter publicly distributed by Shelach. (Hebrew)

incidents, the seeds of doubt would be spread regarding those narratives and their authors.

Yet, appeals for commissions of inquiry were marginal in their effect. Due to their barred access to public outlets such as the educational system, mainstream publishers and the state-controlled mass media, the right sought alternative forums free of censorship, whether overt or covert. Hence, it turned to political forums such as the Knesset and to legal forums such as the courts as well as to commemorative sites, academic forums, or any other venue that could propel their version of the War onto the public agenda. The parliamentary arena was particularly amenable for this purpose. As elected representatives, Begin and his colleagues had free access to the press. They took advantage of coverage of parliamentary debates to repeatedly restate their case: "You can't chain history,"<sup>103</sup> declared Eliezer Shostak (MK, Herut) with respect to Begin's attempts to counter Ben Gurion's obdurate position regarding the character of the War. Yet, although Begin's major platform was the Knesset, his power as a member of the opposition was inadequate to his goals. His demands for parliamentary review were regularly rejected. This state of affairs forced the right to adopt a different strategy and shift its efforts to an alternative public sphere: It turned to the courts, ostensibly to clarify the rights of fallen soldiers' dependents.

It is interesting to observe how this strategy was employed by Begin and his colleagues against Ben Gurion and Mapai in parliament. While the latter applied the *class politics* in their budgetary proposals, the former utilized *status politics* to further their public and historical image. As the following shows, Begin no less than Ben Gurion attempted to delegitimize rival interpretations of the events and texts that had come to construct collective memory. What is especially interesting — and supports

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<sup>103</sup> Shostak, E., *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



the validity of the argument presented here — is the marginal difference of opinion over the facts; what varied was the status of the interpreter, his access to the means of distribution of his message, his control over those means, and the meaning attributed to the events.

A fine example of such a skirmish was the vote of no confidence proposed by Herut on 12 January 1959. "If Ben Gurion wants to argue over history" announced Begin at the opening of the debate

...he will be given the opportunity. Quite incidentally, this week marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day that Etzel, infused with the immortal spirit of our teacher Zeev Jabotinsky, marched to war against the foreign ruler in our land...While we abandoned ourselves to the task, what was Mapai's leader doing?...He did not go into battle; he did not endanger his life, freedom, or occupation...[instead,] he cooperated with the British police in attempting to destroy the Jewish fighters for liberty. In November 1944, the head of Mapai called upon the Yishuv to expel Etzel soldiers from their schools and places of work...to deliver them into the hands of the British...In respect for the Knesset I will not list the names of those who cooperated with their people's tormentors during that terrible period in Europe [the Holocaust] ... their ignominious acts disgrace the history of their land. Your cooperation [with the British] will earn you, Mr. David Ben Gurion, a similar judgment...."<sup>104</sup>

Over the years, Begin would continue in this vein, portraying Ben Gurion as motivated by personal interests rather than the national good.

In closing, Begin attempted to show that he himself, the underground leader, like his fellow militants, had displayed the greater sense of public-spirited loyalty: "During that same bleak November, we declared that under no circumstances would we enter upon a civil war despite the provocations...Our soldiers' vision goes beyond

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.



that of our rivals, we look to history, not to factionalism...." Moreover, he argued, it was Etzel's position regarding the War that would prove to be correct and eventually adopted:

In the fall of 1945, that shameful period came to a close...The Jewish Agency, which had hoped for salvation from the [British] Labor government, was bitterly disappointed and forced to order the Hagana to commence with a military campaign against British rule. Our tormentors suggested that we join in battle...[and] an agreement was reached between the Hagana, Etzel and Lehi...[but] at the close of summer 1946, the head of Mapai decided...to withdraw the Hagana from the crusade for liberty. How could we have been able to oust the foreign rule if Etzel as well as Lehi had lain down their arms?<sup>105</sup>

### **The Altalena**

Portions of another Knesset speech delivered by Begin, this time on the subject of the Altalena (the speech was to become famous, especially due to the epithets that would be repeated during public polemics) is worth quoting:

I accuse you of endangering the lives of thousands of Tel Aviv's residents by bombing and arson, of a vessel full of ammunition and explosives along the city's shores. I accuse you of a third attempt to ignite the fires of civil war in Israel just when the enemy is standing at the gates. I accuse you of the murder of dozens of innocent, saintly volunteers...during meetings of the National Council you were far from modest...you were boastful, exuberant, and cruel while the dead were still draped before you, and said that the cannon you had ordered — without any warning whatsoever — to bombard the vessel surrounded on all sides is a sacred cannon, which should be placed in a specially constructed temple.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Begin, M., 23 June 1948, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

Irrespective of the opposition's public statements, Ben Gurion and Mapai would continue to portray their actions against the Altalena as a moral act, committed within the framework of a nation-state against those who would incite civil war and undermine national sovereignty. The bitter debate surrounding the bombardment of the Altalena would ebb and flow but not retreat from the parliamentary arena for years. "The entire nation has to eradicate the evil among us" was how Ben Gurion would refer to the underground during one debate.<sup>107</sup> He bitterly castigated any attempt to legitimate their Knesset representatives.

As was his wont, Begin suggested that the matter be subjected to a commission of inquiry. Ben Gurion, predictably, objected to any criticism of his views and of the statism he diligently attempted to construct. The ensuing dialogue, rhetorically and psychologically fascinating, encapsulates the attitudes of each with respect to their respective positions. I quote the most relevant parts:

Begin: I propose that you compile your accusations and that I compile mine and that the two of us present ourselves to a commission of inquiry composed of three judges, to be chosen by the High Court of Justice...The judges will decide between us, and the truth, the whole truth, and only the truth will be declared before all.<sup>108</sup>

Ben Gurion: [I have no intention of] contesting the past. The protocols of the Interim Government are open to all....

Begin: No, my dear sir, I will not join you anywhere outside the Knesset's walls. Here I am subject to the law, I respect the law, to which I must obligate you and every member of the Knesset as well. Here, we are all equal in our rights and obligations....

Ben Gurion tenaciously presented Begin's demands as a benighted attempt to politicize history. This strategy, he maintained, was alien and invalid: "That

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

parliament should revise history — this is truly a novelty worthy of broadcasting...the attempt to introduce politics to areas where it does not belong....that political parties should appoint commissions of inquiry for the purpose of writing history!"<sup>109</sup>

During his entire defense of his version of the War of Independence, and no less his antagonism to commissions of inquiry, Ben Gurion painted Begin as a minor player on the political stage of history, lacking in moral fiber and impudently daring to cast doubt on the war and its narrative: "...What does he [Begin] want to say,...that a murderer is walking about — and not an ordinary murderer but a murderer who also happens to be the prime minister, the nation's representative before the Jewish people and the world, the person who directed the War of Independence and the Sinai Campaign?"<sup>110</sup> Importantly, when it came to disparaging the right as parliamentary bloc and Begin in particular, leftist ranks were closed during this period and Ben Gurion found support for his position among opposition members within the left — even the far left. For instance, see the defense of Ben Gurion's position presented by Shmuel Mikonis (MK, Mapam) and Maki, Israel's communist party: "...Begin...is presenting...a distorted as well as petulant historical picture, drawn to prove that the military operations conducted by Etzel and Lehi were those that, supposedly, determined the fate of the repressive British government".<sup>111</sup>

Ben Gurion's arguments throughout this debate were intended to present him as aloof to historiographical issues and his public image. According to this scenario, Ben Gurion was exclusively involved with the mundane daily running of the government. It is from this position that Ben Gurion responded to the proposal to appoint a parliamentary committee to investigate the history of the War presented by

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<sup>109</sup> *Davar*, 29 May 1958. (Hebrew)

<sup>110</sup> Ben Gurion, 23 June 1948, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>111</sup> Mikonis, S., 23 June 1948, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)



Begin's Knesset colleague, Arie Ben Eliezer (Herut), on 28 May 1958. When making his proposal, Ben Eliezer stated that "the underground requires no special recognition," to which he added that Herut was motivated by educational and civic goals: "to educate our youth as to the truth."<sup>112</sup> In response, Ben Gurion noted that from his perspective, attempts to politically influence the nation's recollections of its past were out of place. In order to demonstrate his unconcern for the construction of collective memory, Ben Gurion announced that he had rejected a highly lucrative offer from a major American publisher to write his memoirs: "I am uninterested in writing my memoirs because I am uninterested in the past. I look only toward the future."<sup>113</sup>

But the debate did not end there. Turning to Herut seats, Ben Gurion directed the next comment to Ben Eliezer: "Who is interfering with your writing about or describing the heroism you and your comrades displayed when expelling the British?...I've heard [this complaint] dozens of times and expect to hear it a hundred times more."<sup>114</sup> He rationalized his refusal to mention the underground's efforts within any authorized texts by referring to his historical vision: "This country has a long history; many foreign rulers were driven out but the state did not rise. It rose only ten years ago."<sup>115</sup> Ben Eliezer's proposal fell due to the votes cast by Mapai, the National Religious Party, and the Progressives. The General Zionists, a right-of-center party, abstained. Ben Gurion's hegemonic control over national memory was sustained, with Begin and his movement abandoned, left to continue their involvement with this issue in political isolation.

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<sup>112</sup> *Davar*, 29 May 1958. (Hebrew)

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Judicial Rehabilitation**

Thus, in the absence of other available institutional forums, Menachem Begin and his followers turned to any avenue that offered some possibility of opening a public debate on their status in Israel's history. Throughout this period, Herut's Knesset members would repeatedly demand review of those past events that Mapai had exploited in its attempts to besmirch the underground's reputation and deny its members political legitimacy and access to government posts and political power. In their preoccupation with the status politics, sites meant to facilitate smooth management of the state's public administration, such as the courts and parliament, were identified by Herut as the appropriate memory sites to battle over the underground's historical rehabilitation.<sup>116</sup> This strategy had a somewhat curious precedent: Upon transfer of the State administration to Jerusalem, dozens of Christian clergymen turned to the Court's president, Zamora with the request that the Court, as the contemporary heir of the Greater Sanhedrin, conduct a retrial of Christ's case in order to correct the original perversion of justice.<sup>117</sup>

Decades later, after coming to power, Herut would again demand that three incidents, the cornerstones of Mapai's campaign of delegitimization, be subjected to historical review by commissions of inquiry: the Arlozorov murder, the Altalena incident, and the Dir Yassin incident. Within the framework of this study, Herut's application to the courts is interpreted as a political act, an invitation to a political trial, a tactic adopted by a politically weak rival in the face of the structural advantages

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<sup>116</sup> For a discussion of the politics of class and the politics of status, see Chapter 1.

<sup>117</sup> Maoz, A., 1999. Historical Proceedings — The Kastner Trial and the Commission of Inquiry into the Arlozorov Murder, in D. Gutwein and M. Mautner, (eds.), *Law and History*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, p. 441 (Hebrew); Cohen, C. 1988. *The Trial and Execution of Jesus Christ*. Tel Aviv: Schocken, p. 9. (Hebrew)

accruing to ruling groups. In constitutional democracies, the judicial sphere, contrary to other spheres, appears to be open to all.<sup>118</sup>

The first incident brought to court was the sinking of the *Altalena* by the Hagana (1948). On the ship's decks were crowded 940 men and women, mainly Holocaust survivors; in its hold were arms and munitions meant for delivery to Etzel units then fighting Arab contingents in the battle for Jerusalem. Herut's efforts to initiate a judicial inquiry into the incident were preceded by a similar endeavor, undertaken immediately after the event. In a special meeting of the Interim Government on 23 June 1948, Y. Greenboim proposed that the investigative justice be appointed to question those arrested and decide on whether to continue to detain them or to order their release. In addition, he proposed appointing a ministerial committee to soothe passions and arrange for clemency. In contrast, Herut hoped that the proposed committee would function as a full-fledged commission of inquiry with a mandate to conduct an in-depth investigation, interrogate participants, and publicize its findings. This proposal was later combined with one offered by Ben Gurion: The investigative justice to be appointed would be authorized to free the new immigrants among the detainees as well as those apprehended who had not borne weapons and who had not committed any crime. The proposal regarding an exhaustive investigation was rejected. In response, Rabbi Y. L. Fishman and Moshe Shapira (both of Hapoal Hamizrahi, an Orthodox Zionist party) resigned from the government.<sup>119</sup>

Herut and Shelach demanded that the victims of the *Altalena* operation be recognized as war dead and that their families be considered bereaved families (based

<sup>118</sup> Kirshheimer, O., 1961, *Political Justice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>119</sup> Text of the decision, taken during a regular meeting of the Interim Government, 23 June 1949. Documents transmitted to the Tel Aviv District Attorney by Yosef Kokiya, Director General, Ministry of Justice, 23 July 1953. Ministry of Justice Archives. File 1015, No. 10288.



on the incident's classification as a military action), entitled to government support and official commemoration of their dead. Specifically, they justified their claims by the fact that the incident took place after the formation of the IDF and that several of the Etzel dead had been incorporated into the Hagana, with military serial numbers to prove their status. The sweeping rejection of their demands was formulated by C. Krishtein, Acting Head of the Department for Housing and Rehabilitation, the Ministry of Defense. However, in his letter of 4 May 1951 to the Herut leadership, Krishtein transmitted what was essentially Ben Gurion's decision:

In response to your letter I have been instructed to inform you that the claim for compensation made in the name of the bereaved families listed in your letter has been rejected on account of the fact that all the dead perished during the Altalena incident.

After noting that some way would be sought to assist the families, he comments: "Nevertheless, I have requested that the Minister of Defense express his opinion as to the possibility of providing these families with a beneficence similar to that provided in a different case. I will inform you of his response when it is received."<sup>120</sup> The letter's phrasing reflects Ben Gurion's policy, which was strictly kept: His objection was not to case-by-case support of families but to the global inclusion of Etzel and Lehi dead under the canopy of national martyrdom. This attitude was poignantly if not cruelly expressed in the Ministry's decision not to financially support the erection of headstones at the graves of the Altalena dead and to prohibit their burial within the military portion of the Nachlat Yitzchak Cemetery.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 20-2045

<sup>121</sup> Outcome of meeting with the Ministry of Defense, 24 May 1956, cited in Ben Yosef, A., letter to I. Pinkerfeld-Amir, Head, Personnel Division, 27 May 1956, IDF Archives, 285-74/20.

According to Ben Gurion and Mapai, the public lessons to be learned from the Altalena incident were that Herut could not be considered a legitimate partner in the sharing of power because its members had rebuffed official orders and betrayed the IDF by fighting against fellow soldiers. For Mapai, the Altalena incident encapsulated its belief that the underground's adherents were traitors and about to incite a civil war. This may explain why, of all Herut's demands, Mapai was to object most strenuously to the inclusion of the Altalena dead within the category of IDF dead.

In the face of their inability to convene a commission of inquiry and to obtain positive decisions regarding the Altalena dead, Begin and his associates attempted to initiate an historical investigation in diverse formats and within different public arenas. Consider the case of those families of Altalena fallen who turned to the courts in order to sue for their rights as bereaved families. These private petitions, which may well have been served solely for economic reasons, transformed the courts into an arena for historiographical combat, a memory site for all extents and purposes. Shmuel Tamir, the attorney who represented the majority of families, was a Revisionist, a current member of Herut, and a future Minister of Justice in the Begin government. The overt purpose of the case presented to the Court was to clarify the rights of these families to state assistance, an objective that it achieved. However, its covert aim was to create a stage for a public review of the past. The following examples illustrate how this was accomplished.

The first petition was presented by the mother of Zvi Reifer. Reifer was killed at the age of 21, in Beit Dagan, during an encounter between his unit and a unit of the IDF. A member of Etzel, he was assigned to the 57<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Givati Brigade following Etzel's incorporation into the IDF. At the time of his death, the battalion had yet to be fully integrated. On 21 June 1948, a good part of the battalion left their

encampment and headed toward Tel Aviv after learning that the Altalena was being bombarded; their purpose was to help their comrades who were under attack. The IDF's General Staff warned battalion officers that the group's departure was illegal and that they were to be prevented from reaching Tel Aviv, where the Altalena was moored offshore, even if it required the use of force. Upon their arrival at Beit Dagan, in the outskirts of Tel Aviv, the group was confronted by an IDF roadblock erected to stop them. When their vehicle tried to avoid the roadblock, IDF soldiers opened fire and Reifer was killed.

The Reifer case was, in some ways, a product of chance: his name had been included in the expanding list of IDF dead. Because Reifer had been killed after Etzel had been officially absorbed by the IDF, he was considered, as stated previously, a soldier in the regular army. In December 1950, his mother, Miriam, was declared a bereaved mother and entitled to compensation. However, in 1951 she was informed that her rights had been terminated and that her status as an IDF bereaved mother was null and void. The source of the decision was a group death notice appearing in the party's newspaper *Herut* in June of that year, on the third anniversary of the Altalena incident. The notice included the names of all Etzel casualties who had been recognized as IDF fallen. The Ministry of Defense carefully inspected the list and followed up on all the names, which included that of Zvi Reifer.

In light of this new information, the IDF's Compensation Officer, acting according to Ministry of Defense directives, decided on 9 September 1951 that Reifer's status as an IDF martyr was to be voided:

Whereas this notice serves as proof that the deceased fell during the Altalena incident, while a member of Etzel, and not during or as a result of an order given to an IDF soldier, and inasmuch as such an individual...cannot be



considered an IDF martyr...by law, I have no choice but to cancel the decision of 5 December 1950 and order termination of the compensation awarded to Mrs. Miriam Reifer."<sup>122</sup>

This decision escalated the conflict between the two camps. The said incident was not connected with the expulsion of the British, it had taken place after the IDF had been formed; that is, the victim was technically an IDF soldier. The criterion applied to change his status and end compensation to his family was not normative or universalistic but administrative — it pertained to membership in a state body — and particularistic or circumstantial — the Altalena operation. With respect to the newspaper notice, the Compensation Officer argued that it provided "new evidence that was unavailable to the Compensation Officer at the time that he made his original decision of 5 December and proves that the said decision was based on his mistaken belief that the deceased had died as a soldier in the service of the IDF."<sup>123</sup>

To better understand the evolution of the case, some background information is required. On 27 November 1950, Miriam Reifer presented a claim for compensation according to the law *Families of Soldiers Who Had Died in the War of Independence (1950)*, based on the fact that her son had died in June 1948 and was buried in the military portion of the Nachlat Yitzchak cemetery. For six months she appealed her case before the Compensation Appeals Commission headed by Justice I. Maimon, chair of Haifa's Yad Labanim and Director of Carmel Hospital. Her arguments were primarily procedural. Her attorney, Zvi Hadasi, argued that the Altalena's mission had yet to be proven illegal, that Reifer's death had occurred while the ship was in transit, and that Reifer had not violated any military law. In opposition, the Ministry of

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<sup>122</sup> The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, L16-5/15.

<sup>123</sup> *Decision of the Compensation Officer Regarding the Termination of Compensation Awarded to Miriam Reifer*, 23 November 1953, The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, L16-5/15.

Defense contended that Reifer had deserted his battalion and joined the Altalena forces.<sup>124</sup> Hence, in addition to his conscription status, a procedural matter, Reifer's assumed political loyalties in effect determined the government's response.

Another case that resulted from the difficulties faced by the Ministry of Defense when examining the cause of death of those buried in military cemeteries was the claim presented by Haya Lifshitz. Lifshitz was the widow of Itamar Lifshitz, who had also been killed during the Altalena operation; she had also received compensation. Her status was likewise annulled in June 1951, this time based on the contention that her husband had not died within the framework of an official military operation against the invading Arab armies or during an Arab incursion. Etched on his gravestone in the Nachlat Yitzchak cemetery was Lifshitz's IDF military rank: sergeant. The attorney who presented her appeal, Shmuel Tamir, was not content to base his case on procedural matters, as in the case of Reifer, but to convert the appeal into a debate over history. In the process, he requested that the court allow him to present witnesses from among the political leadership who, he argued, would help him prove that the Altalena incident represented a planned, legal, military operation and not, as Mapai claimed, an attempt to ignite a civil war. Among his proposed witnesses were Menachem Begin, Y. Meridor, A. Lankin, E. Palgin, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense David Ben Gurion, I. Galili, Rabbi Maimon, Minister of the Interior M. Shapira, and Major General Y. Dori. On 21 November 1951, the Commission permitted Tamir to present the witnesses' written sworn statements, but only to the Magistrate's Court in Tel Aviv.<sup>125</sup> After receiving the statements, the Court decided to allow cross-examination and redirect in the courtroom.

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<sup>124</sup> *Maariv*, 30 June 1951. (Hebrew)

<sup>125</sup> *Haaretz*, 25 November 1951. (Hebrew)

The Lifshitz case was not the first brought to civil courts by families of Altalena victims or defended by Tamir. Contrary to the previous cases, which were denied a full hearing, that of Lifshitz was accepted. The reason for this change in policy was that the court had decided that the case could serve as a precedent whose outcome would determine decisions in the other cases. The presiding judges were: Justice Shiloh, with Dr. Shechter and Mr. Grinfeld (representing the Association of Bereaved Families), the latter two representing the public. In response to Tamir's argument that the Altalena operation was legal and planned against the Arab threat, the Ministry of Defense counter-argued that although a number of families, including that of Lifshitz, had received compensation, these were awarded prior to passage of the law *Families of Soldiers Who Had Died in the War of Independence* (1950). Following the law's passage, the Ministry refused to continue to recognize these casualties as War of Independence dead.<sup>126</sup> In response to Justice Shiloh's question as to whether the families would be willing to receive compensation in the form of a Minister of Defense beneficence grant, Tamir replied in the negative.

As the hearing progressed, Tamir read the law that stated that any service would be recognized as military service if so declared by the Minister of Defense, as well as the Minister's announcement stating that any action planned against the invading Arab armies or bands would likewise be recognized as military service. This announcement, as discussed in Chapter One, was meant to bend the law in order to cover pre-IDF Hagana dead. According to Tamir, the Altalena carried weapons to be used in the battle against the invading Arab armies. "[D]espite the fact that the law I

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<sup>126</sup> *Herut*, 10 July 1951. (Hebrew)



have cited is unfair and highly discriminatory, it does include the Altalena operation within...[its] confines..."<sup>127</sup>

Justice Shiloh, agreeing with Tamir about the operation's purpose, stated that the issue at hand was what the Attorney General's position would have been had an accident occurred during unloading of the weapons. The Attorney General's representative sidestepped the question and argued that he [the Attorney General] differentiated between treason in its historical sense and treason in its judicial and legal definition. As he saw it, despite the fact that the vessel's cargo was supposedly meant to support the battle against the Arabs, its true mission had converted it into an instrument of revolution and betrayal. The government's position was, in effect, that the Altalena's victims were not to be denied the status of war dead on the basis of procedural criteria — the legal definition of the military service covered the Altalena dead — but for moral and political reasons.

On the morning of 30 June 1953, the Magistrate's Court in Haifa voided the Compensation Officer's decision to terminate Reifer's compensation.<sup>128</sup> The Appeals Commission's chair, Tel Aviv District Court Judge, A. Mani, Maimon's replacement, claimed that Ministry of Defense arguments had not provided adequate cause for its act. The Commission's current position was considered binding with respect to similar appeals, including that of Lifshitz.

The Mapai government policy toward the underground was not expressed solely toward the dead. In July 1953, another appeal was brought for judgment, but this time with respect to disability. Joseph Hadad, a former Etzel member, demanded that he be categorized as a disabled veteran following injuries received during the

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<sup>127</sup> Tamir, cited in *Herut*, 10 July 1951. (Hebrew)

<sup>128</sup> *Hatzofe*, 1 July 1953. (Hebrew)

attack on the Altalena. The Ministry of Defense refused to do so and declined to provide him with assistance. Hadad's personal reasons for making the claim were financial. He was now supporting his mother and three brothers. He required repeated surgery, his income was limited, and the support that Shelach could provide him was circumscribed. Hadad had initially been recognized as a disabled veteran; he was allowed to purchase a taxi tax free with a special loan jointly repaid with his father. Receipt of this benefit was based on the fact that one brother, also an Etzel member, had been killed in an automobile accident while serving in the IDF. After Hadad's father passed away, Ministry of Defense institutions ceased to recognize him as disabled. They claimed that he was not an IDF disabled veteran because his "injury was not caused as a result of serving in the IDF," although he did have the right to appeal.<sup>129</sup>

Hadad, who had been shot while swimming from the Altalena to the shore, had spent over a year in hospital. His injuries, which had been treated in a military hospital and were the basis for his release from the IDF, qualified him for 60% disability. He had even been awarded a commendation due to his participation, as an IDF soldier, in the War of Independence. Despite this, his request to be personally recognized as disabled and to realize his rights was denied. Shmuel Tamir represented Hadad as well before the Appeals Commission for Disabled Veterans at the Magistrate's Court in Tel Aviv. His argument was similar to that regarding the deceased: The Altalena operation was intended to assist in the war against the Arab invaders, as stipulated in the legal definition of IDF war dead and disabled veterans.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Tamir, S., undated, recording of personal reminiscences, Tamir Family archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>130</sup> *HaBoker*, 15 May 1952. (Hebrew)

A high official of the Ministry of Justice, Attorney A. Gorney, represented the State at Hadad's hearing. Gorney requested that the Commission not review the case at all and reject the appeal; his request was denied. Significantly, the Commission's chair decided that the hearing would be closed to the public. Tamir, who was interested in public review of the case objected, arguing that secrecy was unnecessary. Although he would eventually claim that he had asked to court "to consider the case from the perspective of human kindness and not to overload it with politics and the settling of accounts between Ben Gurion and Etzel,"<sup>131</sup> it was obvious that he was desirous of the public exposure that might induce an improvement in Hadad's condition as well as lend political weight to his camp's position. In voicing his objection to closing the hearing to the public, Tamir stated: "My client...has done nothing to be ashamed of. It is the Court's obligation not only to do right but also to show the public that it is interested in justice, especially since the case in question is of the greatest general concern."<sup>132</sup> The Court responded positively and the hearing remained open to the public.

Tamir had attempted to compel the Commission, whose task it was to deliberate disability issues, into acting as a forum for historical and public review of the Altalena incident. By complying with his request for openness, the Court was snared into doing so. From the start, Tamir claimed that he could provide evidence that the Altalena was supporting the war effort.<sup>133</sup> His arguments were meant to place all the military units that had operated along the Tel Aviv shore into a single context and award them historical symmetry: "My argument is that we should view the

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<sup>131</sup> Tamir, S., undated, recording of personal reminiscences, Tamir Family archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



Altalena incident as a confrontation between two IDF units, the result of an error, and that the State should treat the injured of both units."<sup>134</sup> For this reason, Tamir demanded that the Commission rule that Hadad was eligible to receive compensation "like any other disabled veteran because he was injured in an operation planned for the purpose of unloading armaments intended for the war against the Arab forces,"<sup>135</sup> in compliance with the compensation law. In his reply, Gorney wrote:

Sailing the Altalena [to Israel] was an open violation of a clear commitment, signed by Etzel's head. The Etzel leadership had attempted to ship arms to Israel without government approval and in gross disregard for its sovereignty...Etzel's commanders had been informed of the government's decision that the weapons were to be transmitted to the IDF, but they refused to comply to their orders...the actions taken by Etzel forces, with whom the plaintiff is identified, were illegal and acts of insurrection.<sup>136</sup>

In the course of the hearing of Hadad's case, Tamir requested that the hearings be interrupted in order to transfer the proceedings to the District Court. He claimed that "[a]fter receiving a verdict in principle that will determine the degree to which the Altalena operation was legal, it will be possible to continue to argue the appeal before the Commission dealing with levels of disability."<sup>137</sup> He believed that the present Commission, composed of a judge and two physicians, was not the appropriate body to decide in matters of historical principle. Tamir hoped to acquire a verdict that would mend the historical imprint of the Altalena incident within the public mind and collective memory. The courts, he argued, "with all their moral, public and legal

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

weight, will determine the eligibility of those injured...for qualification as soldiers during Israel's War of Independence."<sup>138</sup>

Gorney opposed ending the hearings for the purpose of a declarative verdict; the Court agreed and the discussions continued on the formal aspects of the case, limited to Hadad's rights to receive financial compensation. This complied with the State's wish to limit the discussion to procedural matters and thereby avoid a decision in principle on the status of the original incident. Nonetheless, the Commission did permit Tamir to present verbal testimony that he believed would prove that the Altalena operation was part of the war effort.<sup>139</sup>

As a result of the arguments presented in association with the various pleas for compensation, and the maneuvers planned to change the disability hearing's venue, the Commission hearings were converted into forums for the determination of historical truth and public morality. The Commissions and the decision therefore contained the potential to influence the evolving political culture of the infant nation. In effect, Tamir had hoped to convert the Appeals Commission for Disabled Veterans into a forum to adjudicate between two contradictory versions of the historical past; its recognition of Hadad's disability was actually a subordinate outcome of this unofficial mandate.

The events should also be seen from the perspective of Herut as the underground's political representative with respect to its attitude to the plaintiffs as well as to the larger role of the various hearings. Hadad's hearing in particular spurred a heated debate among party members. According to Tamir's diaries, the Movement was supposed to decide whether to place responsibility for its representation "on

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> *Al Hamishmar*, 18 July 1952. (Hebrew)

Hadad's shoulders" and his personal battle for compensation and his attempt to place the responsibility for continuing the struggle over the historic status of the Altalena incident on Tamir.<sup>140</sup> One of the main points of argument was moral: Was it fair to impose such historic burdens on the families of the dead and disabled. After consultations with Begin, it was decided that Tamir would continue to act according to his discretion and that the Movement would cooperate as needed. Tamir began to prepare a detailed plan of action. Senior Herut leaders were interviewed. Their testimony helped him to detail the reasons for the purchase of the vessel, explain its goals as well as describe the negotiations concluding in the agreement over unloading the weapons that had been finalized between Etzel and Ben Gurion, Galili and Eshkol. Tamir then set about collecting evidence supporting the testimony, which he later presented to the Commission. These proved, he would claim, that the incident resulted from the government's deceitful violation of its agreement.<sup>141</sup>

After presentation of the documents and testimony, Tamir decided to call witnesses before the Appeals Commission. These witnesses were members of Herut who had taken part in the vessel's purchase and preparing its orders, in addition to members of the government elite. "I intend to spread before you a wide tapestry and reveal before the Court the complete story of the Altalena"<sup>142</sup> proclaimed Tamir before the Commission. However, after announcing his intentions, he began to receive "signals that the Ministry of Defense preferred to avoid exposing all the details... and was seeking a way out that would not damage its reputation while solving the practical problems raised."<sup>143</sup> It so came about that the Ministry of Defense decided to grant the plaintiffs their demands and thereby neutralize a political threat to its agenda, a

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<sup>140</sup> Tamir, S., undated, recording of personal reminiscences. Tamir Family archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.



strategy that avoided formal recognition of the plaintiffs as bereaved families or disabled IDF veterans.

It was the Shimon Peres, then Director General of Ministry of Defense, who informed Arie Ben Eliezer, the Herut MK, of the Ministry's (reluctant) willingness to award the plaintiffs "recognition of their legal rights."<sup>144</sup> Ben Eliezer informed Tamir of this decision. Although Tamir had, from the beginning, deferred such an offer, he was faced with fulfilling his obligations toward his direct clients. Given his formal standing as the plaintiff's attorney in a hearing over compensation, Tamir was forced to bring the Ministry of Defense offer before Hadad. Driven by economic need and the worn out by the hearing and its twists and turns, Hadad ordered Tamir to accept the offer.

Interested in further removing the potential political threat inherent in the plea, the Ministry of Defense, in the name of the Compensation Officer, wrote a letter to Hadad informing him that the funds he so urgently needed would be transmitted only after he withdrew his appeal from the District Court and transferred it to the Ministry's Medical Commission. The same solution would apply to others injured in the incident, with the Hadad decision serving as a precedent. In reply, Hadad wrote that inasmuch as the Ministry had withdrawn its objections to his plea and was ready to recognize him as a disabled veteran, and considering his severe disability as a result of the incident, he was "unable to personally conduct, independently, an investigation into the essence of the incident, as demanded. Accordingly, based on your commitment...I fully believe that the day will soon arrive when the whole truth will come to

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light...Please permit me to note that I will never see myself as a person enjoying charity but as someone deserving compensation from the State."<sup>145</sup>

The last event to be discussed within the framework of Herut's campaign to shift the political discussion of Israel's pre-Independence history to the courts is that of Dir Yassin. In August 1952, the attorneys who had represented the underground's bereaved families and disabled met once again in the foyer of Tel Aviv's District Court. Although the structural and procedural issues were similar, the incident being discussed was of a different order. The Appeals Commission was now composed of Judge Y. Gabizon, Dr. Ziv and Dr. Feller.<sup>146</sup> The families involved were now represented by Attorney Yaakov Meridor, a former Etzel member (and future Knesset member). Whereas the Altalena incident was exploited by Mapai to show just how much Etzel and Lehi veterans were unworthy of reaching positions of power for political reasons, the Dir Yassin incident was used by Mapai to prove the same point, but this time on moral and normative grounds. Mapai made potent use of the episode to attempt to prove that the outcomes of the underground's attitudes towards War — the mass murder of residents of an Arab village — reflected a clear dearth of military ethics.

Once more, the plaintiffs was required to raise historical issues, partially disguised as claims for compensation for injuries or deaths resulting from military actions, this being the only arena still open to debate during the formative stages of national development. In his opening speech, Gorney declared: "Our main argument against the plaintiffs' plea is that the Dir Yassin operation was not a operation planned

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Appeal No. 89/51, Halperin US. The Compensation Officer. [Hebrew]

against the Arab gangs or invading armies because it was totally unnecessary in military terms; its only purpose was to enhance the political reputation of the underground...During the testimony for the defense, I will call witnesses representing the IDF who will prove the facts as stated ... on the one hand, that no military significance was attached to the capture of Dir Yassin, and on the other, that the Etzel and Lehi units had refused to participate in operations having greater strategic value. It is clear to all sides that this is a political trial; I therefore attach special importance to the presentation of clear and conclusive evidence by the state...."<sup>147</sup> As in the cases of the bereaved and the disabled, Mapai would utilize the trial to delegitimize an alternative version of the nation's modern history. Tamir took an analogous position.

The controversy over Dir Yassin revolved around whether the operation had been undertaken with Hagana knowledge and consent. Etzel commanders held documents proving that this was indeed the case. On 7 April 1948, the Hagana's commander of the Jerusalem District wrote a letter to the commander of Etzel's Jerusalem units that the Hagana had learned of Etzel's intentions to invade the village. He stated that although his organization had also planned an attack, he had no objection to Etzel executing the mission. The sole intervention (if we may call it that) into Etzel's program was a list of suggested actions and the recommendation that if Etzel could not hold the village, it should avoid acts such as demolition of buildings, which would cause the residents to flee in panic and invite the entry of armed Arab bands. Prior to the battle, coordination between Etzel and the Hagana was reviewed, during which Etzel officers transmitted their plans to the Hagana, including their

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<sup>147</sup> Gorney, U., Tel Aviv District Attorney, August 1952, letter to the Head, Department of Intelligence, General Staff, personal copy. (Hebrew)



operational timetable. It was also decided that the Hagana would support Etzel in case the latter was forced to retreat.<sup>148</sup>

On 9 April 1948, a force of 150, 90 of whom belonged to Etzel and 60 to Lehi, assaulted Dir Yassin. According to Begin, Etzel had warned village residents to evacuate women and children in a conscious surrender of the advantage of surprise.<sup>149</sup> During the operation, Arab forces began to fire on the attackers. At this stage, Hagana forces intervened; its attack on the Arab forces prevented their entry into the village. Palmach forces also participated in this defensive action.<sup>150</sup> The capture was completed by nightfall, at a cost of four Etzel and Lehi dead, seven seriously injured, and 28 slightly injured. According to contemporary accounts, Arab losses totaled 240, including women and children.<sup>151</sup> After conclusion of the battle, Etzel promised to hand the village over to the Hagana within 24 hours. On 12 April, two physicians, Dr. Avigdor and Dr. Druyan, visited the village upon the Jewish Agency's request. They reported finding numerous corpses of men, women and children, none bearing signs of mistreatment, and piles of burnt bodies.<sup>152</sup>

In the wake of the operation, the Hagana printed a "yellow banner," similar to the yellow Star of David that the Nazis had required Jews to wear, condemning what it called the unnecessary killings and slaughter of women and children. It did so through persistent denials of its role in the incident and of its knowledge of the attack. In response, Lehi issued a public statement in mid April 1948, *Notice: About the Dir Yassin Incident*, in which it brought "to the public's attention the letter written by the Hagana's Commander of the Jerusalem District, no further explanations being

<sup>148</sup> *The Dir Yassin Incident*, Confidential Report, IDF Archives, 922\75-343. (Hebrew)

<sup>149</sup> Begin, M., year. *In the Underground*, vol. IV, pp. 274-6, 282-5. (Hebrew)

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> See footnote 156.

<sup>152</sup> Confidential Physicians' Report, undated, *The Dir Yassin Incident*, IDF Archives, 75\922 - 433. (Hebrew)

required"; the reference was to the very same letter of 7 April, cited above. "We turned to Hagana headquarters," the placard went on, "and suggested that the Hagana enter Dir Yassin...we did what we could. We captured the site and systematically transferred it, position after position, to the district's Hagana forces."

The placard's authors indicated their immense surprise at the Yishuv's perception of the operation because: "On [that] evening...Hagana officers made the request that we coordinate the start of our attack with the attack on the Kastel...which they were about to undertake, and the two operations were indeed initiated simultaneously." We see, then, that an operation that Lehi had thought would improve its public image and political standing — just because it was conducted with Hagana cooperation — brought about the opposite. Moreover, upon their return, they learned that the Hagana and their political backers had used the Arab version of the events to further disparage the underground as an organization and to portray its participants as war criminals to further their own political interests. As expected, this anti-underground version of the events captured the public.

Despite the attempts made by Etzel and Lehi to present their version of the events to the public by the paltry means available to them, primarily placards pasted on public notice boards, little could alter the image created of an Etzel and Lehi-instigated slaughter. Lehi even went so far as to print a placard bearing the opinion of a physician sent by the Israel Medical Society, who had examined all the bodies and determined that with the exclusion of those who had died by gunfire and explosives, there were no signs of atrocities committed to the bodies. Furthermore," the same report stated, "upon entry of the Hagana forces, Solel Boneh [Histadrut-owned construction company] personnel had joined them in order to plunder the machinery and quarry stones located in the village; Lehi soldiers had not participated in the

looting."<sup>153</sup> The outcome of this campaign was marginal. Therefore, it appears that the purpose of the Dir Yassin compensation hearing was to provide the underground an opportunity to discredit the official versions of the events and the images disseminated by Mapai after the operation.

During the hearings, the plaintiffs' attorney requested that all appeals for compensation be combined<sup>154</sup> because the problems afflicting the families were identical; this was done. "All the plaintiffs' requests for compensation have been denied based on the fact that they had been injured in the Dir Yassin attack, an operation that, in the opinion of the Compensation Officer, was not planned against the Arab bands or invading armies; this was the purpose of the evidence I will bring before this Commission." Gorney himself noted that he believed that the true goal of the hearing was not compensation: "Disability is not the issue at hand because only one reason was given for their rejection, and I quote: 'The circumstances under which you were injured cannot be considered to have occurred within the framework of military service according to the *Disability Law* as defined in the statement made by the Minister of Defense as publicized in *Legal Digest* No. 54, that is, the operation is not considered a planned action against the Arab bands and invading armies.'" Once more, the reason for rejection of the plaintiffs' claims was worded thusly: "...not to be considered as an action planned against the Arab bands and/or invading armies." As in the other cases, the veracity of the injuries was not under question.

The documents and evidence brought forth convinced the Commission that the Dir Yassin operation was indeed a certifiable military operation conducted within the

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<sup>153</sup> Placard, April 1948. *Notice: About the Dir Yassin Incident*.

<sup>154</sup> 89, 90, 92, 96, 1951. Original archive files missing – taken from partial photocopies.



framework of the Hagana's campaign against the Arabs. In their concluding statement, the Commission members wrote that:

...after hearing the witnesses, we have decided that the circumstances under which the plaintiff was injured in the present case meet the conditions [for compensation] detailed in the statement publicized by the Minister of Defense. Accordingly, we accept the plaintiff's plea and nullify Compensation Officer's decision dated 24 May 1953.<sup>155</sup>

### **The Arlozorov Murder**

Arlozorov's murder in 1933 is included in this discussion for one main reason: Begin continued to demand that commissions of inquiry be appointed to fully investigate the case and "correct" the historical record as late as the 1980s. The bare facts of this incident, like the others reviewed here, were publicly known. This did not prevent Mapai's transformation of the incident into an asset for its political delegitimization of the right. After the murder, the dam of hatred dividing the two camps swelled with Mapai's efforts to blame the Revisionists for the act, while the latter rebuffed the attack with claims that they were being libeled. Several even claimed that the murder had been committed by the Hagana in cooperation with British secret police as a provocation in their campaign to slander the Revisionist political camp.<sup>156</sup> Abraham Stavsky and Zvi Rosenblatt, two Revisionist sympathizers, stood trial for the murder in Criminal Court, Jerusalem, with Abba Achimeir, the right's leading spokesman and organizer of the "*band of thugs*," accused of masterminding the act. Although the three were acquitted by the Mandatory tribunal, Mapai ignored the verdict and continued its campaign of defamation.

<sup>155</sup> The Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 4\10 - 42. (Hebrew).

<sup>156</sup> Commission of Inquiry into the Murder of Dr. Chaim Arlozorov, 1958. *Final Report*, p. 154. (Hebrew)

The lives of the defendants were henceforth carried on more or less in response to Mapai's allegations and to the public's fixed image of the three as guilty. Stavsky was later killed while on board the Altalena but Rosenblatt, who was publicly identified as directly responsible for the murder, continued to struggle to repair his reputation. This involved two libel trials following renewed attempts to portray him as the murderer, the first brought against Shaul Avigur, the second against Edwin Samuel, both Labor officials.<sup>157</sup>

With respect to Arlozorov, the public debate and call for an official investigation of the incident exhibits a paradox that summarizes one of the major aspects of the politics of domination that characterized the post-war period: Begin was not interested in convening a commission of inquiry that would reveal a "historical truth" different from the "judicial truth" embodied in the court's decision to acquit the defendants. With respect to its public image and standing, identification of the right with the murder was so sweeping and effectively internalized (as Ariel Sharon would contend in 1985) that Begin felt obligated to confirm a verdict made five decades earlier as an instrument of legitimation. Correction of the record was aimed elsewhere.

On 6 June 1956, in the course of the Third Knesset (the original proposal had been made toward the end of the Second Knesset) Begin suggested that a commission of inquiry composed of three judges be convened to investigate the Arlozorov murder: "I look to my left, and plainly see the degree to which the honor of the State of Israel and its leaders are involved in this incident. We know who signed the placard

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-124.

[rejecting the Court's verdict, see the following] and who is morally responsible for it. A whole generation has been indoctrinated according to its contents."<sup>158</sup>

In order to illustrate the labeling and agitation provoked by the authorities, Begin declaimed, with his characteristic combination of pathos and irony, the entire contents of the placard distributed by Mapai after Stavsky's acquittal as part of his opening statement:

Rosenblatt and Stavsky...were both recognized by the High Court as Arlozorov's murderers...the [Court] decision releasing the murderers from [formal] punishment reaffirms the dire charges against them. We are not interested in retaliation, we know that Arlozorov's murderers were victims of terrorist agitation and evangelical Revisionist indoctrination. Our struggle to reveal the truth will not cease...[our mission] is to purify our [civic] way of life, we will fight against the murderers' collaborators in order to protect Arlozorov's memory. We will especially combat the Revisionist movement and their associates who are transforming those who bear the mark of Cain into 'heroes' and 'saints'...and to purify the Zionist camp."<sup>159</sup>

Begin would continue: "A few months prior [to the verdict], in August 1933, *Davar* published the following statement: 'Irrespective of who the murderers were, they were agents of the Revisionist Party.' This appeared on 28 August 1933, at the height of the trial."<sup>160</sup> His recitation of Mapai's blasphemy, he believed, would be sufficient to will support for his demand.

Nonetheless, Begin's efforts to convene a commission of inquiry failed throughout Ben Gurion's stay in office. The left's sweeping and obstinate objections to an investigation suited its program of political manipulation of the case, with its civic

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<sup>158</sup> Begin, M. 6 June 1956, in the course of the Third Knesset (the original proposal had been made toward the end of the Second Knesset) Begin suggested that a commission of inquiry composed of three judges be convened to investigate the Arlozorov murder, *Knesset Protocols*. (Hebrew)

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.



as well as political implications. Begin would be successful only years later, after changes in the distribution of power had made him prime minister.

The final illustration of attempts to alter Mapai's program of delegitimization is the case of Yedidia Segal. During a trial that had begun as a libel suit against the Revisionist newspaper *Herut* (1949), the defense counsel decided to call several witnesses, including senior government officials, in order to expose to the public the acts of torture and abduction committed by the Hagana against Etzel members. The event that instigated the trial was *Herut's* publication of an article claiming that Paul Kollick, a former Hagana member, was involved, even if indirectly, in the murder of Yedidia Segal.<sup>161</sup> Segal, a member of Etzel, had been abducted by the Hagana during the campaign against the underground. His body was found several days later, in the vicinity of Tira, an Arab village near Haifa. Rumors and different versions of the events surrounding his death traveled quickly. Etzel was convinced that Segal had been murdered by the Hagana who, in turn, claimed that the murder had been committed by Arabs. Etzel believed that Kollick's trial would present an excellent opportunity to educate the public about Hagana violence against them during the Season. This motive was alluded to by Segal's mother, who declared at the trial: "You can't return my son to me, but...it would be unforgivable if you blurred the circumstances of his murder."<sup>162</sup>

It was Shmuel Tamir who once more took up the banner of historical redress. During the trial, Tamir questioned numerous agents as to the role of Hagana

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<sup>161</sup> *Herut*, 8 August 1949. (Hebrew)

<sup>162</sup> Begin, M., 1949, *To Their Lasting Memory*, Tel Aviv: Shelach, p. 129. (Hebrew)

commanders in Segal's murder. In doing so, he raised additional issues, pleading that they would support his charge that "the Hagana murdered Yedidia Segal."<sup>163</sup>

The trial revealed that the Haifa Situation Committee (a para-civil defense organization), like the Nahariya Municipality following the Acre Prison break-in, had abstained from publishing a death notice after discovery of the body. It appears that the "Committee was wont to publish such notices only if the victim was 'one of their own,' meaning that he had died in action or was murdered by Arabs."<sup>164</sup> No public figure attended Segal's funeral. In order to support his argument that the Hagana was responsible for Segal's death, Tamir introduced much testimony that revealed Mapai's policy during the Season as well as actions previously unknown to the public.

Tamir also called numerous witnesses from among the contemporary Hagana leadership. Among them were Issar Be'eri, head of Shai, the intelligence branch of the Hagana whose main activity involved stalking Etzel members, as well as the head of Shai's Haifa office. Also called were Rabbi Maimon, Yitzchak Grinboim, and Moshe Shapira, the Minister of the Interior, all of whom were members of the commission of inquiry called by the Jewish Agency to investigate the murder but whose conclusions were never made public. Their testimony revealed that Segal's autopsy report had disappeared, and that the death certificate had never reached Segal's family.

"I understand that Segal's family is interested in correcting the injustice it has suffered and is seeking a way to place matters in their proper light,"<sup>165</sup> commented the presiding judge to Tamir, who straightaway responded that "we will demonstrate the

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<sup>163</sup>Shelach and the Segal family, 1961. *My Soul Will Not be Appeased. The Yedidia Segal Incident as Revealed in the Tel Aviv District Court*, Tel Aviv. (Hebrew) Pamphlet describing the legal proceedings, p. 10, the Jabotinsky Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

Hagana's methods of torture."<sup>166</sup> Through questioning, Tamir was able to prove that Shai had openly persecuted the underground activists, had brutally tortured them, especially by detaining them in solitary confinement, inflicting pain to genitals, tooth extraction, and singeing feet. Knowing full well that the details would not be broadcast in the government-controlled media or published in *Davar*, the Labor-aligned newspaper, Shelach produced a pamphlet documenting the trial, *I Will Not Be Silenced*, in the form of a commemorative volume.<sup>167</sup> Tamir's closing statement took four hours to complete, and "became a dramatic 'I accuse' directed toward Shai, the Hagana leadership, and the regime.... [It] made the damages trial brought by Mr. Kollick against *Herut* an instrument for revelation of the truth."<sup>168</sup> *Herut* clearly supported Tamir's agenda with respect to the trial.<sup>169</sup>

From a purely legal standpoint, the judges declared (19 February 1951) that although Kollick's charges against the newspaper had not been fully substantiated, "sufficient [new] evidence has been brought before the court to initiate criminal proceedings against several Hagana members, and to charge them with first degree murder."<sup>170</sup> During the session held on 20 February 1951, Justice Zussman nevertheless proposed a compromise: "I believe we can agree that Defense Counsel has revealed items and events that were it not for this trial, would never have come to light. However, the prosecution is interested only in what personally concerns the plaintiff."<sup>171</sup> Within the framework of the compromise transacted, it was agreed that although *Herut* would formally apologize to Kollick for its allegations regarding his connection with the murder, it would be allowed to emphasize that:

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>167</sup> Shelach and the Segal family, 1961.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 82.



...this apology is purely personal and in no way detracts from the facts revealed in court about Yedidia Segal's murder...and about the other reprehensible acts committed or on the character of the brutality exercised in the nation toward members of Etzel and the Herut Movement as well as toward other citizens. The prosecutor is ordered to cancel the plea and the defendants are ordered to cover the costs of the trial.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, although the suit was lost, the trial itself represented an effective means for Shelach and Herut to continue their campaign to distribute their version of the past and the facts that the dominant party had so assiduously attempted to extricate from national memory.

After the trial had closed, Herut distributed a placard carrying the caption *The Truth is Revealed*. Under a photograph of Justice Zussman, who had suggested the compromise agreement, was written the following:

Attorney Tamir transformed the formal trial for damages against Herut into a moral and historical crusade against the reign of terror and for the revelation of the truth regarding the murder of Yedidia Segal, may the Lord avenge him, and the other atrocities committed by the Hagana. The truth was further endorsed by the support the honorable justice expressed during the summation. Although the truth came to light, justice has yet to be served. Yedidia Segal's soul will not be appeased until ...the freedom for which he fought and fell is achieved.<sup>173</sup>

### **Summary**

A few weeks prior to the tenth anniversary of Israel's independence, *HaOlam HaZeh* dedicated its cover and lead feature to: "The Tenth Anniversary of the Underground's

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<sup>172</sup> Shelach and Segal family, 1961, *Compromise Agreement, Civil Case File No. 503/49*. (Hebrew)

<sup>173</sup> Shelach and Segal family, 1961, private documents.

War."<sup>174</sup> The article, written by the journal's charismatic editor, Uri Avneri, began thusly: "On 15 May 1948, the blue and white flag raised in parts of Israel became the flag of the State of Israel. This would never have occurred had not the British flag been lowered on the previous day, 14 May 1948. This is a simple historical fact; so very simple that many tend to forget it. Whoever listens to the statements of the nation's present leaders may receive the impression that the lowering of the British flag was an ordinary, more-or-less obvious matter...Witnesses to the struggle against the British are a minority in today's Israel. The million new immigrants who arrived after establishment of the State are ignorant of what had taken place...A gap is liable to develop in our national consciousness that will spread in due time as a result of the official indoctrination that cultivates this amnesia. We therefore felt the need to review the facts...." According to Avneri, "if there had not been a small group of individuals who had organized themselves beforehand and who were psychologically prepared to charge the explosion," the British would never have been ousted. He maintained that "history's verdict [on the events] will be passed only when personal feelings and party interest cease to blur these simple facts."<sup>175</sup>

Avneri's insights were not voiced in the official historiography. Mapai, as the dominant ruling party, totally controlled access to the production of textbooks, history and national memory. With their works published by houses linked in one way or another to the State or to the Party, Israeli authors active during that first decade supported the endorsed narrative. As Zand argues, history had become nationalized in practice. The rational bureaucracy in place, headed by an enlightened ruler who marked the period as an object of veneration, operated unhindered by any critique

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<sup>174</sup>*HaOlam HaZeh*, 8 April 1958.

<sup>175</sup>*Ibid.*

originating among the intellectual elite. This benign atmosphere supported Ben Gurion's production of a monolithic political culture that silenced radical criticism from the left as from the right. Intellectuals who dared to challenge the product or its producers were ostracized and intimidated, perhaps more than they had been during the 1930s.<sup>176</sup>

In opposition to this trend, veterans of the Revisionist Movement stubbornly refused to accept Ben Gurion's version of the War's history. The right therefore searched for and found an alternative arena that could operate as a site for their own historiography. Commissions of inquiry and the courts were transformed into platforms for policy review, forums for the determination of their rights, and sites for the production of collective memory. Decades would pass before textbooks and other sites containing Israel's heritage would incorporate details about the roles played by Etzel and Lehi in the achievement of statehood.

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<sup>176</sup>Zand, S. 2000, *Intellectuals, Truth and Power*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, p. 157. (Hebrew)



## **Conclusions**

### **Private versus Public Heroes**

This study examined the political dynamics underlying the formation of Israel's collective memory in the period 1949-1963, specifically, the commemoration of the Jewish underground dead. Beyond the description of the strategy adopted by the Labor Movement and then Mapai to install themselves at the nation's dominant parties, the study entailed a review and analysis of the responses of the excluded underground parties. Its point of departure is the assumption that the construction and adaptation of collective memory represents a crucial asset for the attainment of political dominance and the exclusion of competitors from access to power. The construction of collective memory as described herein was far from spontaneous. It was a highly rational process, carefully executed by a party and its leader for the purpose of concealing from the public any information, symbols and myths that did not serve its political interests. The spirit of the time was thus constructed with a view toward supporting the ruling political actors and their ability to reproduce and sustain their political power for decades.

From the perspective of history, the study describes, in detail, the awesome influence of leadership and, in this case, of the charismatic leader on the dynamics governing the formation of collective memory. In June 1963, David Ben Gurion resigned from the office of Prime Minister; Levi Eshkol was appointed in his stead. Nine months after his appointment, on 15 March 1964, following consultation with the party leadership, Eshkol presented for government approval the final draft of a

decision unanimously approved by his Cabinet. This decision was made in response to Menachem Begin's demands that the stipulations of Zeev Jabotinsky's will be executed and his remains be brought to rest in Jerusalem. In the eyes of the public as well as of Herut, the decision rested solely on one factor: the Prime Minister's personality. Ben Gurion had peremptorily denied the request despite the inclination of his party colleagues and other members of the government to fulfill its terms. As Begin wrote in *Herut*: "The battle has been drawn out for 16 years, yet only with Ben Gurion's resignation could Jabotinsky's loyal disciples receive full satisfaction."<sup>1</sup> Herut Movement supporters saw Ben Gurion's lengthy opposition to their request as a sign of personal callousness, an act of capriciousness<sup>2</sup> rather than a decision reflecting his party's wishes.

Many had hoped that after Ben Gurion's departure from the political scene the nation's policy toward the commemoration of Etzel and Lehi dead would change: "Mr. Eshkol who, unlike Mapai's former leader, has not been consumed by hatred will certainly repair the iniquities committed by the party leader who imbibed so much from the cup of enmity."<sup>3</sup> Among those same iniquities was the refusal to inter Jabotinsky in Israel. This perception was not exclusive to Herut. The politically neutral media also reported that government readiness to change its policy was dependent upon the change in personalities seated at the head of Mapai: "For more than 15 years, Mr. Ben Gurion, during all the governments he headed, consistently and tenaciously refused to make the decision that would permit execution of Zeev Jabotinsky's will" reported *Maariv*. The newspaper went on to describe the numerous occasions the issue was raised before the government, in addition to the endless formal and informal requests made by a myriad of Israeli and foreign organizations:

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<sup>1</sup>Begin, M., 8 July 1964, *Herut*. (Hebrew)

<sup>2</sup>Tagg, E., 12 August 1963, *Herut*. (Hebrew)

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

It was impossible to find anyone among Mapai's top leaders, excluding Ben Gurion, who was willing to publicly state that he objected [to this act]...As soon as the obstacle of this one individual's personal aversion was removed, the government unanimously voted as it did...The very fact of this common consent from a government whose composition had not changed since Ben Gurion appears to confirm that one person alone was averse to returning Jabotinsky's remains to his country and that it was he alone who had coerced his party, his colleagues, his rivals and the entire public.<sup>4</sup>

Herut's hopes that Eshkol would behave differently with respect to the place allocated to their fallen in the nation's collective memory were also fulfilled in several ways. Consider, for example, the character and name of the national memorial day. After the occasion's name was changed in 1957 from "Remembrance Day for the Fighters for Sovereignty" to "Remembrance Day for IDF Martyrs,"<sup>5</sup> both of which intimated exclusion of Etzel and Lehi dead, it was again changed in 1963 to a more universal version: "Remembrance Day for the Martyrs of Israel's Campaigns."

In addition to new nomenclature and laws, other symbolic gestures confirmed this modification in policy. During the 1963 observations Yigal Allon, then Minister of Labor, participated in the ceremony conducted at the graves of the *Oley HaGardom* (the seven hanged in the Acre prison) in Safed's cemetery. He laid a wreath on Dov Gruner's grave and eulogized the dead. This was the first time in history that an Israeli government official participated in a memorial service for the underground's dead, and represented the first sign of their recognition as official war dead. The newspaper *HaBoker* reported this precedent thusly: "Until now, Israel's ministers were not wont to do so...Fifteen years after establishment of the State, it would be a national

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<sup>4</sup>*Maariv*, 17 April 1964. (Hebrew)

<sup>5</sup>The Commemoration Unit, undated, *The History of the Commemoration Unit*, Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, p. 13. (Hebrew)



disgrace to ignore soldiers because of differences in their beliefs. Mr. Allon has understood this."<sup>6</sup>

In 1967, on the eve of the Six Day War, Menachem Begin was invited to participate in Eshkol's coalition government. Eshkol was desirous of creating a broad-based coalition so as to reinforce Israel's stance toward the war about to erupt. Begin's participation expedited the taking of some additional steps toward inclusion of the underground's dead within official remembrance. For instance, in 1968, Eshkol's government announced "a decoration to the soldiers in the battle for the rebirth of the State of Israel," to be awarded "to all those who were members in one of the armed organizations or those organizations having a military character that fought for the rebirth of the State of Israel from the period of the Shomer until 15 May 1948."<sup>7</sup> The decoration was given to members of the Shomer, Nili, the Hagana, Etzel, Lehi, soldiers participating in the Jewish Brigades during World War I, soldiers who served in the British army during World War II, as well as those who were partisans and resistance fighters during the Holocaust. The awards ceremony, conducted at the official residence of the President of Israel, was the first occasion on which Etzel and Lehi fighters and the kin of their fallen had received public recognition of their contribution to the nation-building effort.<sup>8</sup>

When confronted with these developments, members of the Histadrut's Ideology Committee met in spring 1974 to discuss the issue under the heading: "How to Preserve the Labor Movement's Hegemony." Their conclusions were publicized in the collection edited by Yehuda Gotthelf and Bezalel Shahar, entitled: *Labor*

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<sup>6</sup>*HaBoker*, 30 April 1963. (Hebrew)

<sup>7</sup>Government of Israel, 25 March 1968, *Decision No. 367* (23127). (Hebrew)

<sup>8</sup>Chairman of the Etzel Veterans Association, 11 July 1968, letter to Begin, M., Jabotinsky Institute Archives, 4\1 - 8205. (Hebrew)

*Movement Hegemony — What Does the Future Hold?*<sup>9</sup> During the original meeting, Gotthelf, *Davar's* former editor, warned that: "The danger to the Labor camp in Israel is escalating."<sup>10</sup> Others contended that "The motto coined by Ben Gurion — 'No Herut and no Maki' — was very effective inasmuch as it referred to much more than the plans to expand any single coalition [government]. It identified the [nation's] productive forces, with Mapai at their center."<sup>11</sup> From their point of view, Herut's participation in the coalition had distorted the natural order of governance and had, in essence, forced the Labor Movement to move "from a situation of relative monopoly to a situation of competition."<sup>12</sup>

In 1977, Menachem Begin, as head of the Likud, rose to power. Mapai members and supporters, the hegemonic group lodged within Israel's political culture, refused to recognize this event as legitimate within the context of democratic government. Their feelings were expressed by the author Yoram Kaniuk, who declared that "they have robbed us of the country."<sup>13</sup> Kaniuk's "us" was the same group that after decades of political dominance and cultural hegemony, Dan Horwitz would characterize as "secular, Ashkenazi, personally successful and connected to Labor Movement institutions."<sup>14</sup>

1978 was the first year that a government headed by Menachem Begin was to celebrate Remembrance Day and Independence Day. It appears that Begin took advantage of this occasion to close an historical circle. Recalling that Ben Gurion had forbidden members of the underground to march in the nation's first military parade

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<sup>9</sup>Gotthelf, Y. and Shahar, B., 1974, *Parshiot*, p. 35, Tel Aviv: Histadrut. (Hebrew)

<sup>10</sup>Gotthelf, Y., remarks made at the Ideology Committee meeting, spring 1974, cited in Gotthelf, Y. and Shahar, B., 1974, *Labor Movement Hegemony — What Does the Future Hold?* internal memorandum, Tel Aviv: Histadrut. (Hebrew)

<sup>11</sup>Peres, Y., cited in Gotthelf, Y. and Shahar, B., 1974, *Labor Movement Hegemony — What Does the Future Hold?* internal memorandum, Tel Aviv: Histadrut, p. 5. (Hebrew)

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Kaniuk, Y., cited in Horwitz, D., 1993, *Self-Portrait*, Tel Aviv: Keter, p. 148. (Hebrew)

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 147.

(1949), Begin used the State's thirtieth anniversary to hold another parade, this time including the underground. Members of the Hagana, Etzel and Lehi were to march, side-by-side, through the streets of Jerusalem. Not everyone was pleased with the symbolic meaning of the event. From the Knesset's floor, the *Ma'arach* (a bloc of leftist parties built around Mapai) complained about the implied comparison between Hagana and underground contributions to the War of Independence and warned about "attempts to revise the history of the Yishuv."<sup>15</sup> Hagana and Palmach veterans organized themselves into an informal lobby and called for kibbutz members to boycott the march.<sup>16</sup> The government nevertheless decided to hold the military parade as planned.<sup>17</sup>

The political behavior revealed by the study indicates the parallelism of the strategies adopted by the two contending parties, as delineated by Gusfield and his colleagues. Their approach differentiates between class politics — the formal political framework in which groups attempt to fulfill the material interests of their supporters by attending to budgets, political appointments, and economic, security or social policy — and status politics, the symbolic struggle for legitimacy, status, and image within the public space.<sup>18</sup> Mapai, as could be expected from a ruling party, immediately began highly diversified parliamentary and coalition-building activity in tandem with assiduous efforts to construct the nation's collective memory, including its historiographical and educational elements. Alternatively, Herut channeled all its political and parliamentary energies to historical rehabilitation of the role it had

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<sup>15</sup>*Davar*, 18 October 1977. (Hebrew)

<sup>16</sup>*Davar*, 20 October 1977. (Hebrew)

<sup>17</sup>Government of Israel, 17 October 1977, Minutes of Meeting No. 28, Jerusalem: The Government Archives. (Hebrew)

<sup>18</sup>Gusfield, J., 1963. *Symbolic Crusade*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.



played in the War of Independence. This aim guided Herut policy even after it achieved power.

In the first elections held in Israel, Herut a very respectable 15 seats in the Knesset, which transformed it into Israel's second largest party and the chief opposition party. Nonetheless, it made no effort to be included into the government or to offer an alternative to Mapai's policies. In the face of Mapai's efforts at delegitimation, aimed at excluding Herut from the centers of power and national decision making, Herut's vision remained turned toward the past more than the present, toward its image rather than its policy. It presented itself as the sole bastion of national morality and declared that it would never join a coalition led by David Ben Gurion, even if invited to do so.<sup>19</sup> Such behavior contributed to its image as an actor neither pragmatic nor interested in playing the game of class politics. After the General Zionists (Liberal camp) withdrew from the ruling coalition in 1955, which left open the possibility of Herut joining Ben Gurion's government, it was Begin who rejected the initiative on the basis of impractical and general arguments, a move contrary to those required of political game players. "The crumbling foundations of Mapai's regime contradict the principles held by the Herut Movement," he argued, adding: "We do not barter over principles...We will resist Mapai's regime until it falls."<sup>20</sup> Another opportunity missed to join a Mapai-led government arose in 1961.<sup>21</sup>

It appears that the substance of these actions concurs with Yonathan Shapiro's argument that "Herut acted on the symbolic and mythic plain, and not on the pragmatic plain as did other parties...."<sup>22</sup> Herut was to maintain this pattern even after it attained control of the government in 1977, that is, it did not function as the ruling

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<sup>19</sup>*Haaretz*, 27 July 1951; *Haaretz* 14 August 1951. (Hebrew)

<sup>20</sup>*Herut*, 19 August 1955. (Hebrew)

<sup>21</sup>Meding, 1992. The Herut Delegitimation Theory — Political and Academic Myth or Reality? *State, Regime and International Relations* 36. (Hebrew)

<sup>22</sup>Shapiro, Y., 1989, *Chosen to Command*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim. p. 128. (Hebrew)

power but as an opposition movement still trying to obtain political legitimacy for its success. This was expressed, among other things, in its appointment of Moshe Dayan, the Mapai leader and former general, to the post of Foreign Minister; to the preference for David Levi, the Moroccan populist rather than Shmuel Katz, the Etzel veteran who seemed the natural choice to fill cabinet post; and to the appointment of former officers rather than Revisionist Movement members to other government posts.<sup>23</sup>

It should be stressed, following Bar On, that irrespective of the interpretive stratagems of historians, objective numerical, class and economic variables, the factors that support the level of input to the narrative, have driven groups to the margins of history. Stated simply, some groups were never at center stage nor subsequently driven aside. The historiography of dominant groups, which indeed often prefers to minimize the contributions of other groups, was able to ignore them because of the centrality of the dominant group within the public space.<sup>24</sup> In terms of the number of fighters, like the number of fallen, the scope of the battles and total war effort, the organizational framework and size of its political support, the Hagana was the major force that waged the War of Independence and provided the foundations for the IDF. However, alongside the Hagana were groups smaller in number and narrower in scope. These were excluded from the historical texts written during the Ben Gurion era despite the fact that, according to Aharonson, their actions followed the same models constructed by their mutual spiritual fathers. After all, it was Zeev Jabotinsky who, together with Joseph Trumpeldor, envisioned and in fact created the first Jewish military force in the form of the Jewish regiments that served in the British army during World War I. By doing so, they, too, were forerunners of the independent State's armed forces as well as of the active Jewish resistance to the Arab challenge in

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<sup>23</sup>Katz, S., 1981. *Bereft of Power, Bereft of Glory*, Tel Aviv: Dvir. (Hebrew)

<sup>24</sup>Bar On, M., 1996. The Unrecorded Story, *Yahadut Zmaneynu*, 10, pp... (Hebrew)



Israel. Moreover, as Aharonson continues, Jabotinsky was the father of the idea of an independent Jewish state at a very early stage, a stage at which the leaders of Zionist institutions such as Chaim Weitzmann, and heads of the Labor Movement such as David Ben Gurion, did not dare to even imagine such a prospect.<sup>25</sup>

Irrespective of these facts, Ben Gurion preferred to appropriate the statist project for himself, to identify it totally with his own person even more than with his movement. As the figure responsible for the national resurrection project, he created, as Shapiro argues, "the identification of 'sovereignty' with 'Mapai-ism,' what would lead to a situation where Mapai's form of 'factionalism' would be perceived as less party-oriented than that of its competitors."<sup>26</sup> Ben Gurion and the Ministry of Defense, during his term as its Minister, progressively operated as an Orwellian "ministry of truth."<sup>27</sup> While assisting Israel's citizens to become free men from the point of view of Rousseau, it persuaded them to internalize thought patterns conceived by its leader and to view competing attitudes as unfeasible and antagonist to national sovereignty.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, Ben Gurion himself declared that:

What cannot be accomplished by means of law and government, can [be accomplished]...by the force of ideas, and examples will be provided by the party." This position supported his positive attitude toward "party education [indoctrination], that is, political education within the State...as it should be."<sup>29</sup>

The purpose of the associated steps was to preserve the power relations enjoyed during the period of the Yishuv but within a democratic framework. Only

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<sup>25</sup>Aharonson, S. 1999, *David Ben Gurion, Decline of the Renaissance's Leader*, Sde Boker: University of Beer Sheva Press, pp. 209-210. (Hebrew)

<sup>26</sup>Shapira, A., 1985, *From Dismissal of the Hagana's Commander to the Dismantling of the Palmach*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, p. 60. (Hebrew)

<sup>27</sup>Orwell, G., 1971, 1984, Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (Hebrew edition)

<sup>28</sup>Rousseau, J.J., On the Social Contract, cited in B. Susser and D. Tzur (eds.), 1990, *Political Theory, Selected Readings*, Tel Aviv: Schocken, pp. 273-312. (Hebrew)

<sup>29</sup>Ben Gurion, D., 8 April 1949, Remarks made at a meeting of Mapai members in the offices of the Prime Minister, cited in Shapira, A., 1985, p. 62. (Hebrew)



now, "the focus of education and inspiration had shifted from the pioneering movements to the party."<sup>30</sup> Ben Gurion continued: Although intellectuals and opinion makers supported Mapai's leadership in the pre-State era of the Yishuv, "this is inadequate [now]...We need to channel all our intellectuals toward a specific political path...and gird that path with examples taken from the party."<sup>31</sup> Shapira's statement that "whoever does not directly link what was good for Ben Gurion's and what was good for the State can readily conceive of a different course of development for the defense system"<sup>32</sup> was not made in vain.

Ben Gurion's target audience was comprised of those who had not personally experienced the War of Independence. The first generation of Israel's citizens had formed their opinions and acquired information directly from the events; some had even participated in the fighting. Instead, Ben Gurion's sights were set on the second generation of citizens, especially the waves of new immigrants who arrived in the 1950s. This audience would vote in future elections and determine the political leadership. Ben Gurion was far from being glib when he stated: "The ingathering of the exiles [*kibbutz galuyot*] is the State of Israel's primary concern." He then called upon the populace to take an example from "those few citizens, such as the Yaakov and Zvi Maimon brothers, and Rikva and Mordechai Guber" who had assisted in absorbing and educating immigrants.<sup>33</sup> While these activities were motivated by the desire to assimilate the masses of newcomers, they also presented opportunities to transmit political messages to these fresh audiences in the form of commemorative

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<sup>30</sup>Shapira, A., 1985, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup>See footnote 29.

<sup>32</sup>Shapira, A., 1985, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup>Ben Gurion, D. 1963, Introduction. *Yizkor* volume in memory of Varda Friedman, killed while working to absorb immigrants: see Chapter Five.

ceremonies, such as the military parades.<sup>34</sup> Official monuments were likewise employed: They became points on "the patriotic map of Israel,"<sup>35</sup> as Azaryahu calls them, major stopovers on fieldtrips organized for schoolchildren and immigrants.<sup>36</sup>

In general, the approach termed the "as if" methodology allows the scholar to equate organizations with their leaders<sup>37</sup> despite the fact that the organizations themselves often display differences of opinion and attitudes polar to those finally chosen and molded by the leadership into the organization's policy. Ben Gurion more than decided policy, he also dictated the policy of governing the elite's attitude to the construction of collective memory, as he did for every other arena of public life. Acceptance of authority — or obedience to that authority — avowed by him as a fundamental principle at the beginnings of his career in the Yishuv, continued to be central to his personality and style of governance.

It followed that anyone who differed with Ben Gurion was seen as unworthy of taking part in any ruling coalition that he might construct. His determination to exclude Herut from every position of political power expressed this attitude. A breach in the acceptance of his authority by Herut's leaders in the pre-State period was never forgotten. Mapai's attempts at coalition building were carefully and consciously directed toward creating a system of alliances that would prevent Herut from attaching itself to other parties, a process that guaranteed its isolation.<sup>38</sup> But more: Throughout his government career, Ben Gurion refused to call Herut's leader, Menachem Begin, by name. In Knesset debates he would refer to Begin as "the person

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<sup>34</sup>For example, on Independence Day 1951, the military parade held in Jerusalem included a column of children from Ein Kerem immigrant transit camps. See *Davar*, 10 May 1951. (Hebrew)

<sup>35</sup>Azaryahu, M., 1995, *State Rituals*. Sde Boker: Ben Gurion Archives, p. 210. (Hebrew)

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 210-213.

<sup>37</sup>Doron, G. and Sened, I., 2000, *Political Bargaining*. London: Sage, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup>Goldberg, G., 1992, *Israel's Political Parties: From Mass Parties to Electoral Parties*. Tel Aviv: Ramot, p. 34. (Hebrew)



sitting beside Knesset Member Bader." As he would explain it, this habit was similar to that of individuals who avoid calling a monster by its name.<sup>39</sup>

Only after Ben Gurion was replaced as Mapai's head did the situation change. Mapai, while it remained in power, began to display readiness to expose Israel's collective memory to the historical contributions made by its rivals in the effort to establish the State. We may even conclude that this attitude accelerated the transition to a period termed by students of the Israeli regime as "the period of the disintegration of Mapai dominance."<sup>40</sup> These factors, together with Herut's initial participation in government led to public legitimation of Begin as a political leader and, a decade later, to Herut's success in the 1977 elections.

In November 1952, Uri Avneri, the editor of the leading radical left weekly *HaOlam HaZeh*, wrote an article in the form of an open letter to Prime Minister David Ben Gurion; its heading read "Subject: Private Heroes."<sup>41</sup> At the time, it appeared that Ben Gurion was about to end his tenure as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. Avneri's request was for Ben Gurion to perform "a great act of justice": "My appeal is that in your capacity as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, you demolish all the sorry barriers that separate between men and between graves, and introduce unity and equality among my friends, members of my generation who, under different flags and mottoes fell for the sake of Israel's rebirth." Avneri's letter was the result of his understanding that official commemoration policy, as formulated by Mapai, reflected the decisions of one man only; hence, responsibility for that policy was personal:

The courage to admit their mistakes is required by all the sides. Surrendering Jewish fighters to the British Secret Police, who tortured them in cellars and

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<sup>39</sup>Arian, A., 1990, *Politics and Government in Israel*, Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, p. 19. (Hebrew)

<sup>40</sup>Goldberg, 1992, p. 37.

<sup>41</sup>Avneri, U. 26 November 1952, *HaOlam HaZeh*. (Hebrew)



drove them into exile, is a painful episode. Yet, charitable gestures, admitting one's errors and abandoning one's pride are the qualities demanded of a national leader. A leader such as you, who was directly responsible for glorious chapters of the War of Independence, can allow himself these traits.<sup>42</sup>

Avneri goes on to explain that denial and exclusion of the underground's members and fallen from Israel's the pantheon of bereavement and heroism is not only immoral, but it provokes social ills and schisms, the evolution of a dominant, statist political culture together with a private and insulated counter-culture. Ben Gurion, Avneri believed, had helped many bereaved families to feel that they were partners in the nation-building project although, at the same time, "he had prevented a significant portion of Jewish youth from feeling that they themselves were also real partners in the state to which they had contributed so much." Avneri concludes his analysis of the political implications of Ben Gurion's policies thusly:

At one end of the altar of youth the independent tradition of the Palmach was practically born...that [now] views itself as persecuted and discriminated against. At the other extreme, Beitar holds private memorial services to the *Oley HaGardom*, the Nili episode, the defense of Tel Hai, the ghetto uprisings, Hannah Senesh and her comrades, the various underground organizations and their programs, illegal immigration and the War of Independence, all these are found in private correspondence filled with mutual accusations, in nurturing private rituals, honoring private heroes and writing private histories. This is a worrisome and morbid phenomenon.<sup>43</sup>

The politics of the production of collective memory did not end with the decline of Mapai dominance. Indeed, the groups that paid the greatest price for that political dominance penetrated the social consensus, the map of commemorative monuments, the commemorative (*Yizkor*) literature, and the public consciousness.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

However, an incident that transpired recently attests to Israel's continued preoccupation with the subject. In May 2001, Limor Livnat, the Minister of Education, notified the public of her disqualification for use in the public schools of a history text dealing with the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> The book, she contended, minimizes the value of the Revisionist heritage and distorts Zionist history while adopting a critical perspective regarding Israel's struggle for independence.<sup>45</sup>

Livnat, the daughter of important Lehi activists and members of the Revisionist Movement (the "national family" as they are frequently referred to), serves as a minister representing the ruling party, the Likud, and is identified with its hawkish wing. Her steps against the trend that the history text represents are surprising from an historical perspective because they relate to the exclusion of educational texts "damaging" to the image presented of the infant State of Israel, led by Mapai with Ben Gurion at its head, as just and responsible. Although the textbook portrays the underground's contributions during the pre-State period as marginal, it does provide some details about their struggle. Yet, in objecting to the book, Livnat was paradoxically continuing Mapai's campaign to further its own public and political standing. Consider the irony: The daughter of Lehi members who had experienced discreditation as well as political delegitimation of their efforts in the nation-building project, a process that had excluded them from positions of influence and power, was to counter any attempt to damage the positive image of those who had executed that exclusionary policy once she herself had achieved government office! Livnat did not target the book's rehabilitation of Etzel and Lehi as the desirable political project; instead, she chose to preserve the image of her party's historical rivals.

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<sup>44</sup>Jacobi, D. (Ed.), 1999, *A World in Change*. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education. (Hebrew)

<sup>45</sup>The Minister decision reflected the conclusions reached by a specially convened commission, as recommended by the Knesset Education Committee, for the purpose of examining the text. See Special Commission for Review of *A World in Change*, *Final Report*, 4 March 2001 (Hebrew).

The case of Livnat and the history text is interesting because it illuminates a larger issue, that of the political transformation that Israeli society has undergone after the period discussed in the study (1949-1963). The historical rivalry between the two political camps who were "partners" in the struggle for establishment of the State, the Labor Movement and the Revisionist Movement, has been reconstructed into cooperation. Within this cooperative framework, the two camps are together contending with a new trend, termed "post-Zionism" in the literature and the press. This trend is threatening the legitimacy of their common challenge — sustaining a Jewish democratic state in Israel — as experienced by each camp in its own way. Side-by-side, Limor Livnat and the leftist Meir Pa'il waged a political and public battle against a textbook's entry into the education curriculum. Significantly, Pa'il, a veteran of the Hagana, had participated in the fighting against underground activists and, as a military historian, had spearheaded the campaign to exclude Etzel and Lehi from any mention in the historical literature. The two are jointly braving the attack launched by what some have argued is the new elite, the dominant group among Israel's academics and intellectuals.<sup>46</sup> This trend in historical revisionism is challenging more than just the approach adopted by each political and ideological camp in the nation-building project; it is also questioning the moral legitimacy of the project's very goal.

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<sup>46</sup>Karsh, E., 1999, *Fabricating Israeli History*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, p. 11. (Hebrew)



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